

Sorcerous Stabber Orphen Rogue Journey Book 03

Spectre, Sleeping on My Chest

魔術士オーフェンはぐれ旅

我が胸で眠れ亡霊

秋田禎信



富士見ファンタジア文庫

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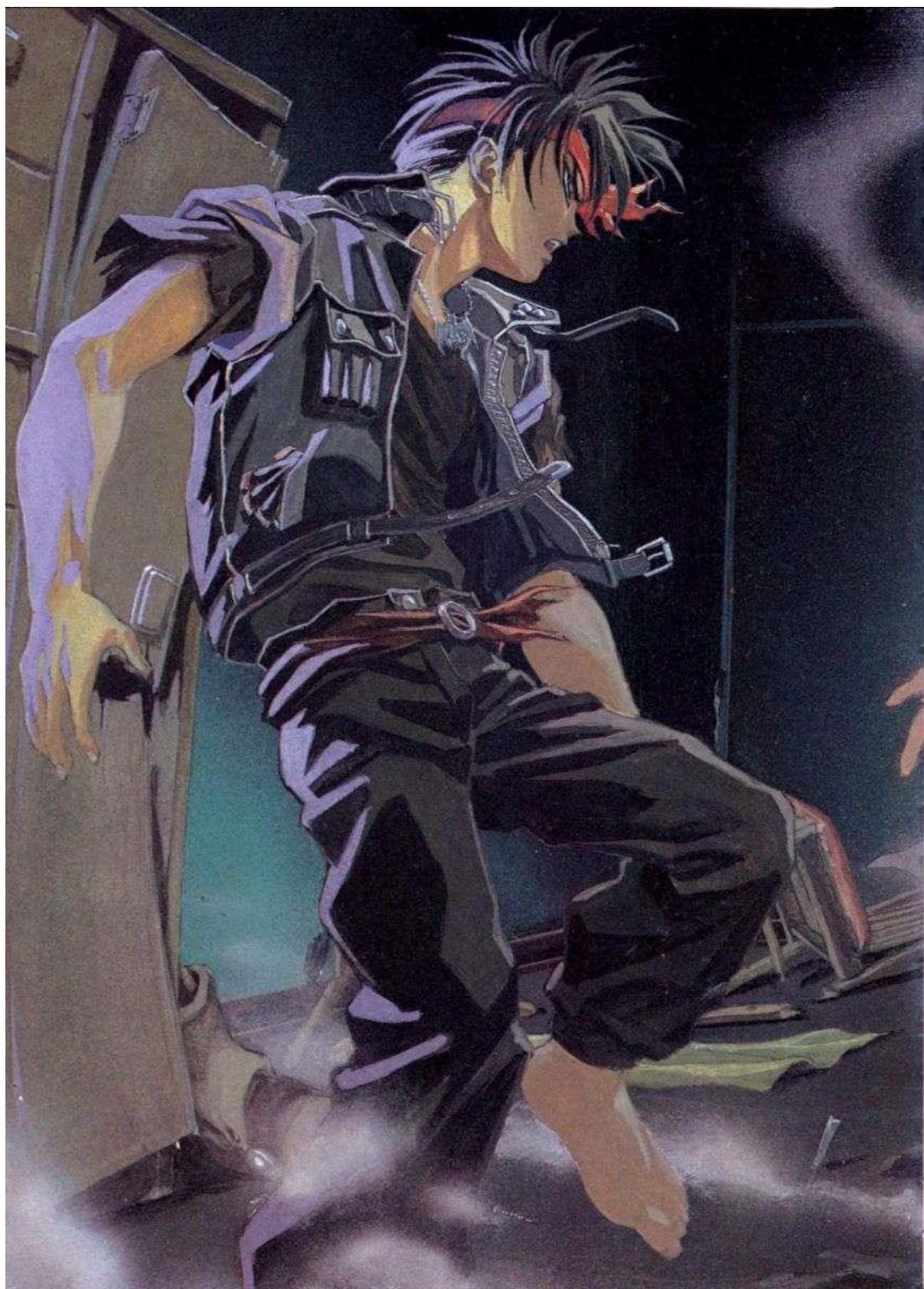
魔術士オーフェンはぐれ旅
我が胸で眠れ亡霊

「死んでも恨むなよ」
つぶやいてオーフェンは右手を突き出した。
「我は放つ光の白刃」



“亡霊”は金切り声にも近い声音で絶叫した。
「オ・マ・エ・ハ——フオノゴロスノ
ツイミツケタ——」







クリーオウの後ろ回し蹴りが、
男の顔面にヒットした！

Chapter 0 – Prologue

Under the light of the bar, two people talked about business.

“I have information about a man called Orphen——“

A thin piece of paper with exquisite handwriting was handed to a woman, upon seeing this, she laughed——her red lips turning into a crooked smile, a dangerous smile. Looking at her from the front, you couldn't tell her exact age, though, it seemed she was in her early twenties. She had the emaciated face of a whore, her eyes looked as sharp as a knife, as they sparkled. Her long black went down to her waist, and her entire body was wrapped in leather, a leather body suit of sorts.

There was no denying her beautiful face, nails, arms or legs. However, there was something that made men keep their distance——it was her eyes. Whenever she would speak, her voice would be hoarse.

“.....Well, how do we deal with this man, Mr. Oswald?”

The man called Oswald was a gentleman of forty years old, he had white hair, and a thin body. He was surprised when she said his name, under his beautiful white suit, his body quivered. He looked to his side and saw his large bodyguards, he smiled, and this calmed him down a bit.

“How do you know my name?”

The woman snorted.

“I also know the layout of your home, you go to the bathroom alone, your guards are always forgetting whose shift it is, and they aren't very smart.

“Is that so? You're good.....”

Oswald laughed, he then waved his slender fingers.

The woman payed no attention to his words.

“What's the plan?”

“Shouldn't it be obvious, Hirietta?”

The woman called Hirietta put a finger on his lips, she couldn't help but laugh.

“You're right.”

She started reading the report.

“Black sorcerer Orphen. No last name. Probably under twenty years old. Unmarried. No relatives or known parents.....Although the information we have specifies he originated from the Tower of Fang, the Alliance of Sorcerers denied this, before he came to the Tower he was known by a different name.....”

Reading the rest of the report, her tone changed.

“He is in the business of illegal debt collection.”

“His practices are illegal, I won't tolerate this.”

Oswald said, while he rubbed the hem of his white suit.

Hirietta smiled and said: "He is like a fly flying around in your room, this bug is annoying you, whether he is causing actual harm or not, is that right?"

"Indeed. He will serve as a warning to others. We can't let this fly attract anymore insects."

"Do you have a plan for this insect?"

"Well....."

Ostwald paused for a moment, his bodyguard's standing motionlessly behind him.

"In any case, it's easier to get someone else to take care of him.....someone like the highly trained assassin *Foolish Dog*, you weren't easy to find, Hirietta."

He elegantly looked towards the woman.

"Someone of your calibre is better suited to taking down a black sorcerer."

A grin appeared on Hirietta's face, Ostwald smiled back at her.

"Will you accept this mission? I've heard that the *Foolish Dog* never refuses a job....."

"Of course."

The *Foolish Dog*——Hirietta answered immediately.

Ostwald laughed, he was very satisfied with her answer. He leaned back in the creaky chair, and started talking:

"But let me remind you, this guy isn't a pushover——several times I've send men to eliminate him, they all came back half dead."

"He's a rogue, he can beat many opponents with his magic."

Hirietta then glanced at the bodyguards standing behind Ostwald, she could tell that they were angry, but there was no change in Ostwald's expression.

She stood up from her chair.

"How much?"

She was wondering how much she was going to be payed, Ostwald deliberately avoided giving her a straight answer.

"That depends on if you can complete the task."

Though——Hirietta was not one to complete a job based purely on how much she was going to be paid.

Why is this? Ostwald didn't want to ask this question, nor did he care about the answer.

Chapter 1 – A gathering of fools

When the incident occurred——Majic took three cans out from the carriage, he put the cans onto a plate, then added more wood to the fire. He sat down, and started hammering at the edges of the can with the can opener, this was a habit of his.

There was some text on the cans that Majic didn't understand, he was concentrating on getting the canned meat ready to eat. He couldn't open it, so he took a screwdriver and tried that instead, he then took a look around——many shadows of the forest were cast on the ground. The nearest road was only a few metres away from the forest, the carriage was facing the road. The fire glowed in the dark, Majic intended to enjoy his dinner.

"I hope I'm doing this right."

He said to himself. He then raised his small chin.

"Cleo could have easily made the food——if she had the proper equipment and supplies, she wouldn't be half bad——as for Master, he should have been back with that firewood."

His young red face resembled a girls. He was about fourteen years old, but his hair wasn't long like Cleo's, it was short and blond, and looked golden whenever the sun would shine on him. He has a pair of blue eyes, this gives him the impression of a quiet and sophisticated man. Although, the black sorcerer clothing her wears isn't appropriate for him, it gives people the impression that he is a rogue.

He finally got the can open, but it was lumpy pea soup. Majic didn't really mind, so he slowly heated it over the fire, he waited a couple of minutes for it to heat up.

Suddenly, footsteps were here behind him, followed by a sharp cry.

"Ah——!"

Majic's body shivered all over, he was too afraid to run away. Sure enough, a blonde girl was staring right at him, she pointed at him with an angry expression.

"Cleo——"

She acted like she didn't hear him.

"What are you doing?! Today is my turn to cook! Do you plan on eating dinner without us?"

Even though Majic didn't really want to eat this meal, he couldn't think of anything to say to her.

"Ah, well, I was just——"

He lifted his hands into the air, and looked at her. She was wearing a pair of dirty jeans, her shirt was sleeveless and it had a yellow butterfly pattern on it. These clothes were obviously bought by Orphen, and it seemed he forced her to wear them.

"You were too slow, I didn't want to wait any longer. Should I have waited?"

"Slow? What's that supposed to mean?"

"I didn't mean anything by that....."

Cleo's face was full of anger, she was always one to let her emotions control her, and this always gave Majic a headache. But, Orphen always tolerated her, maybe that's because they share the same morals, Majic thought.

"Were you trying to imply that I'm slow?!"

Cleo moved closer to him, she waved her fists at him. He raised his right hand to defend himself, but that didn't work.

When the incident occurred, Orphen was gathering firewood in the forest, he was quite a far bit away from the carriage.

Even though he went into the forest, he knew he wouldn't be able to escape Cleo's cooking——Orphen and Majic always found her food hard to swallow. Even before she had started cooking, they had never tasted anything worse.

That's why Orphen choose to go into the forest.

Standing in the middle of the forest, he was wearing his usual black clothes, and a scarf tied around his head. Though, he wasn't armed, for a black sorcerer doesn't rely on armour or weapons, he relies on his magical capabilities. However, when his magic isn't enough, he can use one of the twelve weapons he keeps concealed on his body.

Generally, when sorcerers were going into heavy battle, they would use different types of combat outfits, like the tan leather jacket Orphen bought. Orphen, like most sorcerers, love to wrap themselves in many different types of clothing. This gives them many hiding places to place either defensive or offensive weapons, like chains, knives etc. Even though Orphen's skills were sometimes for hire, he never considered himself a mercenary, nor would he ever use his fighting skills purely for the acquisition of wealth.

Someone would only be able to identify what Orphen was by his pendant, the symbol of the Tower of Fang, a dragon wrapped around a sword, this proves that he is a black sorcerer.

Then——

Orphen stopped in his tracks.

"Someone's coming."

"Is that so?"

A woman's voice came from the woods, then she appeared in front of him, she was wearing a full body leather outfit.

"Are you, Orphen?"

"Who's asking?"

Orphen observed the woman in front of him——her hair was black and soft, she had a very attractive body, and a thin face with red lips, her mouth opened, she was wriggling her tongue at him.

"My name is Hirietta, did you receive my letter?"

Orphen pulled a letter from his pocket.

The woman——Hirietta, smiled and nodded.

“Here it is.”

“I’m guessing you’ve read it.”

“I want a straightforward answer.”

Orphen stared at her.

“What business do you want with me?”

“You know…….”

Right after Hirietta said that——a flash of silver light flew towards Orphen, it missed him by an inch.

Orphen then saw her take out a large knife, he took a defensive posture.

(This woman——)

Orphen’s heart beat intensely, as he avoided Hirietta’s knife attack. This was the second time her attack wasn’t successful, once again, Orphen took a defensive stance. She came at him again, this time causing something to splatter on the trees, it was blood——

Orphen’s breathing was erratic, he was thinking about why this was happening.

(Did Ostwald hire this assassin?)

Although this was only a guess, he had no time to ponder.

(I can just see the morning paper, “Orphen versus the assassin”——damn it, I won’t end up as a papers headline!)

He waved his right hand towards the woman, and shouted:

“Amber shield, from my fingertips!”

Suddenly, a wall of compressed air appeared all around him——seeing the wall forming, Hirietta jumped backwards. Usually, ordinary people don’t have special weapons to attack sorcerers, however——

(The assassin is unlike any other, she predicted my move.)

When someone has no chance of winning in a head on attack, they generally rely on underhanded tactics or traps. Once in a trap, and if you don’t have time to escape, the result is death.

(I didn’t expect to be fighting such a skilled opponent.)

Orphen knew that he didn’t stand a good chance of winning, he was thinking of a way to escape.

(No matter what trick or trap she’s sprung——I can’t fall for it.)

“Guide me, O Starling of Death!”

A humming sound could be heard……the sound started to get louder, the ground started to tremble under the noise——Hirietta struggled to stand up, she was then struck with an electric shock and sent tumbling to the ground.



She remained motionless.

.....The forest was calm once again, but Orphen remained in a defensive posture, he watched the assassin lying on the ground.

"Hey, is that all you've got?"

Orphen remained vigilant.

"I know you aren't knocked out, or do you think I'm stupid?"

Sure enough, after a few seconds, she slowly sat up. She wiped the blood off her mouth with her leather sleeve, then she picked up her knife.

"If my attack lasted a few more seconds, you would have fallen unconscious."

Orphen smirked.

"But even so, after such a direct hit, you shouldn't be able to use your full strength."

"Want to bet?"

Hirietta said, as she jumped towards him——Orphen was dumbfounded, even though he still managed to deflect her attack, he was sent tumbling backwards.

"How is this possible——!"

(She shouldn't have been able to attack head on, the barrier was still up. Even a horse would faint, never mind a person——)

He didn't have time to think, the woman was readying another attack. Orphen pushed thoughts of escape from his mind, he had to end this fight. He rushed to her side, stretched out his hand and shouted:

"I tear thee, wall of the earth!"

He created a vacuum in the air, the air surrounding him rushed in, shock waves from the resulting whirlwind struck the assassin. Such an attack would normally cut through three strong branches. However——

The shock wave bounced off and hit a nearby tree, there wasn't even a mark on her clothes. But her head struck a nearby tree, this left her with a slight concussion, she looked dazed, her legs were shaky.

(Intriguing.....)

Orphen said inside himself, he then whispered something.

"Don't blame me if you die."

He stuck out his right hand towards her.

"Sword of Light, whom I do release!"

A torrent of white light flew from his hand, the intense heat struck Hirietta in the lower abdomen, and exploded, flames were sent everywhere. Fire and dust filled the air, then it dispersed, but——the assassin was unharmed. The explosion made her hold down on her lower abdomen, her clothes weren't damaged, there wasn't even a scratch.

"Damn, I can't believe it——"

Orphen cursed under his breath.

"You're clothes are very strange."

"That's correct—and your attacks can't damage me directly."

The assassin replied, staggering from the impact of the previous attack. She used a knife to cut a piece of her hair which was burnt by the fire, then she took a step forward.

Orphen thought he heard Majic's voice approaching the scene.

"Even so, you're still an ordinary assassin."

"If you can keep up your defence."

Hirietta said as she held the knife towards her face, she smiled demonically.

Orphen smacked his lips and said:

"It doesn't matter what kind of defence I put up. What you've got to worry about is your head, because that's the only place not covered by that leather, you'll be a headless corpse soon enough....."

"I'll let you in on a little secret——"

Hirietta grinned.

"One of the men who hired me is called Oswald. Xanadu Oswald."

"So, one of the infamous loan sharks in Totokanta has set his eyes on me. Answer me this, why have you told me his name?"

"No reason in particular."

She laughed, Orphen thought that she was crazy.

Then she lowered her tone of voice.

"Well, he isn't the only one who wants your head. There's others....."

".....There's more than one guy who wants to kill me?"

Hirietta kept a straight face——then suddenly she threw a knife towards Orphen.

"——Ahh——!"

Orphen twitched as the knife came towards him, but the knife wasn't flying directly at him, it struck something behind him.

He looked behind himself, it was a burly middle aged man, a knife was stuck in the man's throat. He was gasping for air as blood was poured from his throat and mouth, the small crossbow he was holding fell to the ground.

Orphen was stunned as he watched the dying man, Hirietta just shrugged her shoulders.

"Oswald is a cautious man——that was probably another assassin he hired."

".....Why would you kill a fellow assassin?"

"I am only a means to an end."

She gracefully walked past Orphen and picked up the knife, Orphen didn't look behind himself.

"There's something else I don't understand..."

Orphen scratched his head.

"Why aren't you continuing to attack me?"

"I was testing your capabilities. Anyway, if you are as good as they say you are, then you won't have a problem defeating me."

Hirietta said as she pulled the knife from the man's body. Blood had stopped coming from the body by the time she was finished, but she was already covered in blood.

She turned around to him, her face covered in blood.

Orphen watched her clean the blood from her leather body suit, he then thought about the name Hirietta. That name reminded him of an assassin called *Foolish Dog*, if the rumours are true——

Then this assassin before him is no other than the renowned sorcerer killer.

When the incident occurred, a very peculiar event was happening close to the incident.

"May I have your attention! Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls! Gather round and see a spectacle unlike any other! This is the first public appearance of the terrifying snake man!"

He could hear his brother shouting outside the box. The box was too small and stuffy. He didn't know where his brother got the box from, but it smelled.

From the intense yelling, it sounded like his brother was in very high spirits. He could sense that people were gathering round, with the sound of music now in the air, he prepared to open the box.

(I can't stand this.)

Dortin sighed.

(How did I get myself into this?)

They were in a small village far from the nearest city, they were hoping to deceive some children to get some money.

He took off his thick glasses, then he began to rub them with his fur cloak.

It's been over two years since his brother dragged him from his home, he sometimes wonders how he even made it this far. In the past two years, he brother told him that they'd be making big money, but this has only led to endless troubles.

Just when he was complaining, Vulcan's voice outside the box got louder.

"Everyone! I present to you——a rare snake man!"

Dortin wanted to hold the box shut, but it was too late. The lid of the box was removed by Vulcan, bright sunlight shined into the box.

In the village square, there was more people than Dortin could ever imagine—it was early summer, and at this time of the day, there was only middle-aged women with their children, taking advantage of the lunch break from the church, (in this frontier region, the church is also used as a school) boys and girls ran out of the church. His brother Vulcan was eagerly awaiting the reaction of the crowd, but they didn't expect to see two short men who looked like children, in this part of the continent it was unheard of to encounter a little person.

Dortin usually dresses the same as his brother, fur cloak and sword at his side, but this time he was wearing the head of a snake like a hat. He couldn't stand the staring of the crowd, he was blushing as he began to stand up.

"Ohh.....ahhh——"

.....

The square suddenly went quiet——

Shouts of joy rang out throughout the crowd.

"Success!"

Listening to the sounds of the crowd, Dortin couldn't help but do the victory sign.

"Mom that was amazing!" These street performers are cool!"

"They are more like clown performers."

(.....Well, it seems that we're popular.....)

Vulcan didn't mind, or simply didn't notice, he was only concerned with one thing.

"Good people! Won't you help pay for the surgery to turn this snake man back into a normal human being, please put whatever you can into this bag——"

As soon as he opened the bag, the crowd turned around and began to leave.

"Oh, we've had enough laughs for one day."

"It's good to get a good laugh sometimes."

"I didn't think they'd ask for money."

"Wait, don't you want to save this poor man?"

"....."

In a brief moment, the village square became deserted. Vulcan turned around to his brother with an angry look on his face, he then pulled the snake head off him and threw it to the ground.

"This is all your fault."

Vulcan gave Dortin a wild look.

"Looks like we'll have to settle for another show. Man gets stabbed and strangled in the street."

"Who's going to perform it?"



“Of course it’s going to be you.....or we could go with something else involving you.....”

“Why does it have to be me?”

“Because I say so!”

Vulcan beat Dortin down to the ground, Dortin wiped the blood from his nose.

Looking around the place, they only saw a church and a few scattered buildings, the village wasn’t very big.

They usually move from village to village trying to gain some form of money. They walked until they arrived at this village with a family run Inn, they stayed inside of one the villager’s houses illegally. When they were discovered, they were allowed to stay in the house only if they did chores in the local Inn for free. They stayed there for a while, in order to make a living they decided to become street performers, though they didn’t expect this to happen on their first day.....

Dortin looked at the snake skin, it was very impressive. If they were to roll it out, it would be at least ten metres in length.

“.....Brother, where did you get the snake skin from? Did you get it from an actual snake?”

“Yes.”

Vulcan proudly said.

“I found it in the nearby forest, the same goes for the box.”

“Oh.....”

Dortin looked at the box for a moment, it was the length and width of a one meter cube. It looked very durable, that was apparent from the heavy lid.

However, Dortin couldn’t help but feel that something was wrong——

“You know what Dortin, you failed to learn a good lesson today. Looks like you’ll have to practice tomorrow.”

“Uhm, okay.....”

Dortin secretly looked inside the wooden box, on the bottom there was a couple of weathered red numbers, five, zero, and one. It must be the manufacturer's serial number, maybe a date of manufacture? ——If true, that would mean it was manufactured a decade ago. He also looked for other markings, he saw a “do not turn upside down, fragile goods”, and he took down this information.

And lastly——a “danger, do not open” sign.

When the incident occurred, no one was paying attention to Kink Hall village, mostly because it was a frontier village.

When the incident occurred, no one knew how long it was going to last, especially the dead.

Chapter 2 – The Fool Who Took the Bait

“Orphen, I sometimes think...”

“Cleo, I sometimes think...”

Two people said to each other.

“You seduce women quite single-handedly.”

“You really are a headstrong girl.”

Then there was silence in the carriage.....even the horses remained quiet as one of them jumped on one of the seats, they were afraid. Orphen grasped the reins of the two mares in a flurry.

He whispered to the girl behind him, but didn’t look back.

“When did I seduce a woman?”

“When was I headstrong?”

They stopped talking. The scenery started to change, the wind blew and rustled the grass, dust was blowing in the deserted street, and the sun rose to its highest point.

Orphen reluctantly recalled what happened last night——Majic and Cleo were arguing over dinner, then Orphen appeared with Hirieta, both of them covered in blood, the only thing he said was that “he had a headache”. They didn’t know what happened, he only told them that “she helped me out”.

The next morning, Hirieta disappeared. She left a note with a kiss on it beside Orphen’s pillow.

The note said she “had to leave in a hurry”, and “if you’re willing to meet my client, then come to Kink hall.”

Aside from leaving Majic and Cleo, this note proved troublesome——Cleo obviously misunderstood the meaning of this note. She was sure that Orphen and Hirieta had spent the night together, and they were going to spend another night together, though she didn’t say this out loud.

“I’ve known you almost a month——”

Cleo stuck out her lips, and started chewing on them.

“First you propose to my sister.”

“It was just a scam. It was an idea that Vulcan came up with anyway.”

“Yet the last time we stayed in a hotel you grabbed the waitress ass.”

“That was a simple misunderstanding. My hand has a mind of its own sometimes.”

“As for what happened in Alenhatan.....”

“Don’t bring up Stephanie, she’s a good friend of mine.”

“I’m not finished. You were seducing that waitress with your eyes, I saw you.”

"Oh, come on. She was asking for it."

"And let's not forget how you punched that young lady in the carriage, all because she waved her fist at you."

"Well, she was asking for it too. Besides, she started it."

"You also sneak out in the middle of the night with Majic, leaving me all alone."

"I'm teaching him magic, that's all."

"....."

Cleo closed her mouth for a moment—her eyes were no longer angry, her eyes twinkled.

"I want to learn magic too!"

"No way."

Orphen answered immediately.

Cleo was obviously not satisfied with his answer.

"Why not?"

"It's rather simple, Majic's father pays for his tuition fees. Every month I get money put into my bank account."

He goes to the big city every month, he generally spends a couple of days in Totokanta while getting the money.

"Tuition fee? Can't you just teach me?"

"Not just anyone can learn magic. You need to have the proper genetics, you'd need to be born again if you wanted to have any chance to learn magic"

"Born again....."

Cleo sighed.

"I wish I was born again."

Cleo muttered under her breath, upon hearing her, Orphen asked her a question.

"Do you believe in the afterlife? You are the second daughter of a wealthy family, you can live the high life. I don't think travelling with an illegal loan shark is a good idea."

"What's all this about? Are you looking to argue again?"

"No, just speaking out loud, seeing as I'm having to waste my money buying you clothes. You'll probably be the end of me.....by the way, what in the world do you want from me?"

"Ah..."

Cleo frowned. She hesitated for a second before giving him an answer.

"I, didn't think you'd ever ask that question."

She put a finger on her chin, and continued talking.

"Well, give me some more time. Then I'll answer your question....."

Cleo pondered for a moment.

“O-Orphen, what did you call me last time? Partner, wasn’t it?”

“.....”

Orphen didn’t answer. He was surprised by this.

“Go on, don’t be shy.”

“No, I didn’t.....”

Orphen didn’t look at her.

“Oh, forget it. You know what I thought you were when we first met?”

“.....Human?”

“No, a ruffian!”

“I was joking. There’s no way in hell you’d ever call me your partner!”

“.....What?”

Orphen responded in a hoarse voice. Of course he remembered he said that, he just didn’t want to admit it.

“Orphen is a very powerful person, so I want to be just like him.”

Majic chimed in.

“.....Yes, I don’t know what I was thinking. He is a very powerful person indeed.....”

“Huh?”

Cleo smiled. But Orphen just laughed.

(Great, I’ve won this round.)

“Master.....”

Majic poked his head out from the carriages curtains, Cleo glared at him intensely—she didn’t him putting his head in between both of them, Majic was sweltering under the intense heat inside the carriage, he was sweating all over.

“Are we going to spend the night in Kink Hall Village?”

“Yeah.”

Orphen took out the note that Hirietta gave him.

“The message said to go to this village.”

Orphen crumpled the note and put it back into his pocket.

“What’s in Kink Hall village?”

“I don’t know.....actually, I think there’s supposed to be some well-known scholar of magic hiding in the area.”

“Magic? Is he from the Tower of Fang?”

Majic asked. Orphen shook his head.

"You could say that. He got expelled from the Tower because he was studying some strange type of magic, he should be somewhere in the village."

".....I wonder if we'll have the chance to meet him."

Majic wiped the sweat off his head, Orphen took out a handkerchief from his pocket and handed it to him.

"I highly doubt it, the guy is probably a corpse. He was expelled fifty years ago, if he's still alive, he's probably more than a hundred years old."

"He could be alive, I've heard of an old lady who lived until she was one hundred and twenty."

"Yeah, yeah."

Orphen said as he patted the head of Cleo. He then thought about their whole conversation and the "partner" thing.

Orphen then thought about the note again, there was another part that he didn't read out to Majic and Cleo.

"In fact, I was commissioned by my original client and Ostwald, though, it really makes no difference to me."

This was actually a threat: "If you don't come to Kink Hall, they'll kill you."

They were getting closer to the village, they could see a white chapel in the distance, Majic and Cleo both looked at it.

"Oooo....."

"What is it?"

Orphen didn't know why they were amazed, it was just a simple frontier village, about 100 kilometres away from Alenhatan.

As they arrived closer they could see multiple houses, an elementary school, police station, and a couple farms. There was some children playing in the haystacks, the only adult nearby was an old man who was lying down, it looked like he was letting the children take care of the sheep while he rested. In the distance, they could hear the barking of dogs.

Such views of the countryside were nothing out of the ordinary.

"Hello, Majic?"

Orphen asked. Majic's face was that of amazement, his emerald green eyes flickered when he spoke.

"It's a nice place."

"I guess so."

Orphen casually replied.

".....What about it, Master. Couldn't you see yourself living the life of a farmer for six months, with a wife, and probably a bastard child or two?"

"You already know the answer, Majic."

—Just as he finished, the curtains of the carriage opened, Cleo stuck her head out. She was sleeping for a while, her hair was a mess, she washed her face after waking up, and parts of her face was still wet. Orphen pointed his finger at her.

“This is my answer.”

“.....Oh, I see.....”

Majic said enigmatically as he nodded.

Orphen looked back at Cleo and said:

“Hey, make sure to put your sword at the bottom of the luggage. We don’t want to be mistaken for robbers.”

“I know, I’m not an idiot.”

Cleo did as she was asked. Then she asked him a question.

“Why did you even agree to meet this woman?”

Orphen felt speechless—he knew she was angry.

Half of her body was now sticking out of the curtains, Orphen could feel her hair on his shoulders. It was like a snake wrapping around its victim, he wasn’t happy.

“Well, are you going to answer me?”

“Whenever someone is entangled by a beautiful girl, it’s said that they are your wife.”

Cleo blushed. Orphen laughed.

“I’m joking. Anyway, Hirieta’s just a mercenary that’s going to protect me for a while.”

He didn’t call her an assassin, he called her a mercenary because he didn’t want the others to know her true identity.

Cleo was sceptical, she didn’t believe him.

“Why is she protecting you?”

“I’ve got enemies in these parts.”

Orphen said, as he looked to the front. They were now entering the village. Majic smiled and joined in on the conversation, he was still sweaty from before.

“So, should we expect trouble?”

“.....Probably, don’t worry. However, I don’t think I’ll have to kill someone.”

“Oh, okay.”

“Master, your life is at stake, they could strike when we least expect it, we should stick together at all times.”

“The idea never crossed my mind.”

“But Orphen, who wants your life?”

Cleo asked. Orphen calmly replied.

“Well, before I met you guys I was an underground loan shark, I made both enemies and friends. And whenever I run low on funds, I go round seeking the money that is owed to me. That raccoon dog Vulcan owes me money too.....”

“Do people pay back the money?”

“Seven people owe me money, I’ve caught five of them.”

Orphen was getting frustrated, Cleo was hanging on his shoulder.

“I’ll find Vulcan soon enough, he won’t escape me.”

Orphen spat onto the ground.

“Anyway, there are those who see illegal loan sharks as a thorn in their sides.”

“Who are they?”

“Oh, shut up! One of the gangsters goes by the name of Ostwald, he’s a big wig in Totokanta’s financial sector. He wears fancy clothes, has a moustache, and is fat and annoying.....”

“.....Is he the one.....?”

“Stop asking questions! Short answer, yes, he’s one of people after me. He’s hired assassins to come after me.”

Orphen grunted.

“Are you done with the questions?”

Orphen waited for an answer from both of them. But he only heard Cleo hesitantly talk.

“Well.....”

Then all of a sudden, something moved in front of the carriage, but it was too late, whatever it was went under the wheel. Orphen pulled on the reins, the two horses started to panic, Orphen looked at what happened.

There was a snake sticking its head out of a wooden box in front of them.

“Ah——”

It was actually some guy wearing an outfit, Orphen recognized him.

“Dortin!”

“Loan shark!”

Two people shouted. Orphen then went to see what he ran over.

Naturally, whatever was under the wheel was struggling, it was wrapped in a fur cloak, and had a large sword by its waist.

“You mongrel! Stop gawking and get this thing off me!”

The sun was setting, a crow cried twice in the distance.

It was very rare for Kink Hall to get any visitors, never mind five at one time, for a while, the town was a busy place.

Kink Hall village only has one small hotel on the outskirts of the town, it was pretty basic, since the hotel rarely received visitors. Although they are staying at an Inn, it looks no different from one of the village's normal homes, except it was built by a famous person.

".....So, there's some house built by someone famous?"

Orphen asked, as a small boy carried their luggage up the stairs, Majic and Cleo followed after them. Vulcan and Dortin were in the kitchen helping out.

"Yeah, and his name was Fonogorosu, he also died there."

The boy replied. He's repeated the same thing to all the guests that ask this question, he then went on to say:

"He was killed with magic."

"Magic?"

Cleo said.

"Yeah. Everyone says the house he lived in is haunted. "

"Haunted?"

Orphen saw a look of intrigue on Cleo's face, this worried him.

"That sounds like fun!"

"You've got to be kidding me."

Majic couldn't believe Cleo, he looked up timidly.

"Master, tell me she's joking."

"You heard it right from her mouth, she isn't joking."

Orphen said reluctantly. He then stretched forth his hand, pointing it at Majic.

"This isn't the first time, every time Cleo thinks something "sounds fun", it always gets us in trouble."

"That isn't true at all!"

"Whatever you say."

After they got into their room, Cleo forgot all about their previous conversation. The room was a converted bedroom, it was small and there was two beds. There was a small window where light shone through, and a wardrobe that was falling apart, it looked like it was assembled from old windows. On the wall was a painting, it was an ugly ivy leaf pattern, it seemed to be from the Inn keepers personal collection.

Orphen gave the little boy a tip, then he left, Cleo looked at the two beds in bewilderment. She then looked at their luggage in the corner, she examined the layout of the entire room, and she even inspected the inside of the wardrobe. There was a single glass lamp in the middle of the room, it hanged from the ceiling and didn't give out much light.

"——Cleo, who do you want to bunk with?"

“What?”

Cleo shouted, turning around to face Orphen.

“There are only two beds.”

“.....”

Majic and Cleo turned to Orphen. He just scratched his head, and looked at Cleo.

“Looks like we’ve got a problem.....I guess I’ll sleep on the floor, or the carriage.”

They all nodded in agreement.

“Well, now we’ve only got to find something to do.”

Cleo said, then she smiled.

“I know, I could listen while you give Majic some magic lessons.”

“I’ll think about it.....”

Orphen took off his shirt, and sat on the nearest bed. He thought about it for a moment—— to tell the truth, he didn’t really want to kill this girl. There was no specific reason, he just thought that Cleo was more trouble than she was worth. But then again, he really didn’t want to have her listen to him teaching magic. He also hated the prospect of having to sleep in the carriage, since he couldn’t afford to be wasting money on another room. It just wasn’t practical.....

(Oh, alright.)

“Class begins after dinner.”

Orphen said, Cleo immediately became cheerful. He didn’t expect her to be so pleased.

(.....It’s not like she’ll be able to learn magic, right?So, there’s no harm in her attending the lesson.)

This is what he thought, at the time.

“It’ll be a history lesson for today.”

After dinner, when the sun had gone down, the only thing that could be heard outside was the insects. Orphen, Cleo, and Majic gathered in the room. Orphen talked as he opened the window, Cleo heard him and asked:

“A test?”

“Yes. It’s a history lesson, I hope you’ve remembered what I’ve taught you.”

Orphen shifted his gaze to the bed next to Cleo. Leaning against the windowsill he said:

“And repeat yourself, if need be, for Cleo’s sake.”

“Okay.”

Cleo was like a mother watching over her child.

“Ohoo.....”

Majic and Cleo both looked at Orphen. He shifted his gaze upwards, staring at the air, he began to say:

"On this continent, Majic can be divided into seven categories."

He had everyone's full attention.

"Out of the ancient races, six of them stole their magic from the ancient gods. The other one, the Dragon race, received their magic through breeding with another race."

After Majic finished, he folded his arms.

"What happened next?"

"Can I look in the books?"

"Of course not."

Majic reluctantly continued.

"The ability to use magic is based on the individual's genetics....."

Orphen interrupted him, as he pushed away from the windowsill.

"Oh——sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you."

"It doesn't matter what age you are, or whether you're very strong, the proficiency of your magic is based on your willpower."

Cleo listened the entire time,

"Tell me more about high level magic."

Orphen interrupted the lesson, and said:

"When I was in the Tower of Fang, my teacher was Childman and I was in his class, there was seven of us in total. In the top level of the Tower, there was seven people that——"

He shrugged.

"Oh, never mind. Majic is the one telling the story, not me. Continue....."

"Well, there is voice magic, this is the most powerful magic on the continent."

"Yeah, it's pretty good."

Orphen chirped in. Majic continued.

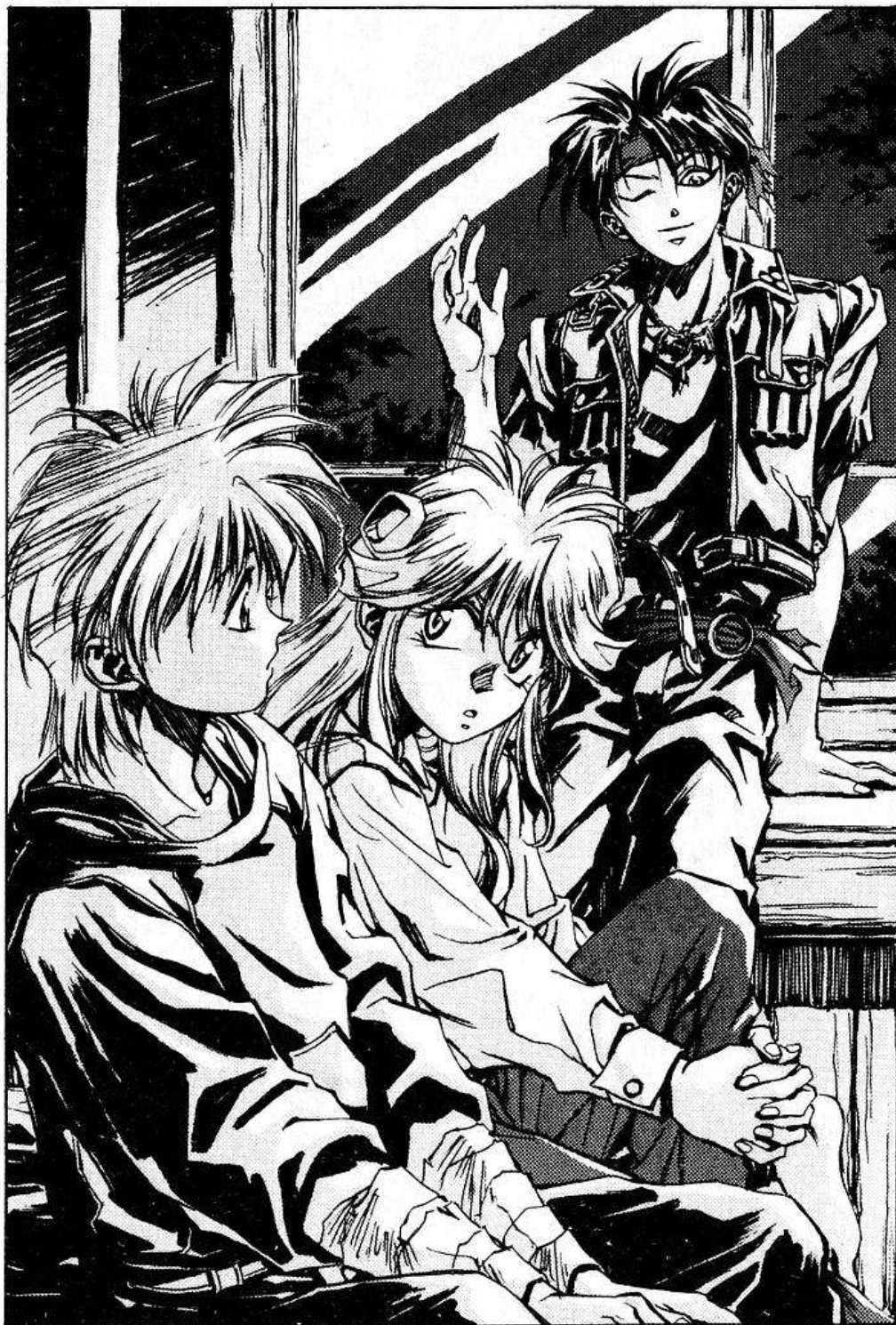
"There are seven different types of magic in total. Voice magic, which is what we humans use. Silence magic, dark magic, air magic, spirit magic, destruction magic, and beast magic."

Orphen nodded to him.

"The most significant feature of voice magic is the use of our voices, sound is used as a medium to cast magic. You say the incantation and you get the desired effect. However, this cannot be sustained forever. Furthermore, voice magic has two sub categories, they are Black and White magic. Master and I use Black magic."

"Black magic is the use of thermal and physical energy....."

Orphen stepped away from the window, the he spoke.



"While white magic is the opposite, it's the manipulation of time and spirit. It's also said that white magic is much more powerful than black magic..."

He then turned in the direction of the bed, he looked at Cleo.

"Cleo, did you understand that?"

".....Ah——"

"Hey! Don't fall asleep!"

Orphen ran over and shook Cleo until she fell down on the bed.

"This is so boring."

"You were the one who wanted to listen, so I suggest you listen to it all."

Cleo attempted to lift her body.

"Will you teach me how to use magic tomorrow?"

"Why you little....."

Cleo fell back down on the bed, she seemed to fall asleep again, Orphen's hands trembled as he said:

"I can't teach you magic since you don't have the necessary genetics! And stop pretending your asleep!"

"Ah....."

Cleo let out a deliberate cry, as she hugged the pillow. Orphen crept closer to her and said:

"We've wasted more than enough time on your nonsense! You deserve a good thrashing!"

"Master....."

Majic was speechless.

"Why must you always argue with her?"

"Because I'm sick of her. She needs a lesson on manners."

While Orphen was thinking of something nefarious, Majic was confused about something.

"Master, I'm a little confused, how is it that I'm able to use magic?"

"Well, you obviously didn't get the genetics from your father, I can tell you that. So, that only leaves your mother....."

Cleo was still pretending to sleep, Orphen sat on the bed beside her and started petting her head.

"When your father was drunk one time, he did talk about her. His wife——your mother——her name is Iris Lin, she was a thief. He didn't tell me why she left. I had also heard that she had magical talent, this is where you inherited the ability to cast magic."

Orphen recalled Majic's father Bagup, his old weathered face peering back at him. He felt Cleo move, the girl stopped pretending that she was asleep.

“.....So, if I didn't inherit the magic blood, I can't use magic?”

“Yes, that's correct.”

Orphen had mixed feelings about Cleo, so he removed his hand from her head.

“Even though you are from the noble Everlasting family, it's impossible for you to use magic. I'm sorry, Cleo.”

Majic couldn't believe this.

“Master, I never expected you of all people to comfort Cleo.”

“Oh, shut your mouth!”

Orphen shouted, his face went bright red. Cleo then took the pillow and threw it at Majic.

Ding dong! Ding Dong!

(What's that noise?)

He could hear it in the distance, he wasn't sure where it was coming from. All around him there was a black fog, he was surrounded by total darkness. Then the ringing sound became clearer, it went through his eardrums, into his brain.....

“—————!”

Orphen woke up from a dream. His entire shirt was drenched in sweat, he jumped up from his bed, his heart was beating intensely.

“Why? This feeling?”

It was still dark outside, he could see the stars clearly. He was lying in the middle of the two beds, he made a bed on the floor instead of sleeping in the carriage. Majic and Cleo were sound asleep. Majic's sleeping position was very structured, while Cleo was all over the bed, her arms and legs stretched in every direction. Orphen looked at them for a moment, he then grabbed his jacket. But he didn't put it on, he closed both his eyes with his right hand, as if he was trying to remember something.

Back when Orphen was in the Tower of Fang, he was taught to control his memory and mental state. However——

(I can't do it.....)

This was no surprise. His heart was beating intensely, he was unable to calm himself down.

(Is...this...white magic?)

His knee suddenly gave way, he grabbed a chair to keep his balance. Normally people who can use white magic isolate themselves from the world, or are under the exclusive use of the Royal Family, very few have even experienced first-hand contact with a white sorcerer. Orphen was one of them, for some of his former friends were proficient in white magic.

(Who the hell is doing this?)

A chill went through his entire body. Then, the chair he was leaning on flew towards the ceiling.

“Holy shit!”

Meanwhile, Orphen felt like his entire body was being hit by a tsunami, the waves breaking the silence of the night. It was like an invisible force was contracting and expanding everything in the room, from the wardrobe to all their belongings. It was a sickening feeling. Then, the beds were turned upside down, and the occupants went with it. Everything in the room was being thrown about the place, the windows broke, the Gaslamp exploded, and the doors on the wardrobe came off the hinges. The room was a mess.

“Ahhhhhh!”

—Majic was yelling, those sickening feelings they felt were now gone. Orphen stood up in the mess of a room, he put on his jacket, and took out the dragon pendant from his pocket.

“W-What happened, Master?”

Majic said, as he crawled out from underneath the overturned bed. Cleo was miraculously sound asleep, however, she was speaking all kinds of gibberish.

Orphen whispered:

“The enemy.....is coming.”

He didn’t understand that himself, he thought that the nightmare was a warning, maybe even a premonition.

“The enemy.”

Orphen repeated it again, as he clenched the pendant in his left hand.

(My body.....that was really something.)

Orphen hadn’t felt anything like those strange feelings before.

(The culprit can’t be far, I must find him.)

He was now focused, a bead of sweat dripped down his forehead. From the corner of the room, a blanket of darkness appeared. Like a mist looming in darkness, it slowly moved to the centre of the room—Orphen backed up against the window, he never blinked, the blanket of darkness encroached upon Majic’s position.

“Hey!”

Someone shouted. An intense knocking on the door then followed.

“Sorcerer! You smelly bastard! You’re too noisy! If you don’t be quiet and go to bed, then I’ll force you to look at the moon until you die!”

If Vulcan heard the noise upstairs, the others are sure to follow.

The fog had a spherical radius of fifty centimetres, it then began to take a form. Orphen didn’t have time to open the door and tell them what was happening, nor did know if he could make it to the door.

At that time, the fog made a noise.

“.....I.....”

Surprised, Orphen took a step backwards. The shape the fog was taking—it was that of a human being.

“...I...I...”

Thud thud thud.....

The knocks on the door intensified.

“What did.....you say?”

Orphen was taken aback, he had never seen this, he just gazed through the translucent human form. Meanwhile, Cleo had woken up, she knew immediately what was going on.

“It’s a g-g-g-ghost!”

(A ghost.....an undead monster?)

These words appeared in Orphen’s panicked brain. Indeed, it had a vague outline, but it was taking a human shape. In this case, to call it mist or fog would be inappropriate.....

“No way, that sort of thing doesn’t exist——”

The fog uttered something in a shrill voice in protest.

“Fonogorosu!”

The outline was still vague, but he could see a young man. He looked very thin, his elongated eyes gave him a sinister look. He was wearing something which looked like a researchers outfit.

“Fonogorosu?”

Just as Orphen spoke, Vulcan kicked open the door. The hinges flew off the door, it looked like it was going to impact the ghost——

"——!"

Orphen jumped out of the way, the ghost moved towards Orphen’s last location at an incredible speed.

A loud explosion rang out. The ghost ran through the wall, creating a big hole.

“.....?”

The room was silent once again.

“What the hell was that all about?”

Vulcan and Dortin stepped into the room, both of them were wearing their pyjamas. Majic still under the bed said:

“.....That was, a ghost.”

“A ghost?”

Dortin said. He looked very sleepy, he then wiped his glasses and said:

“Don’t say that again. I know you’ll just come up with an idea to make money——”

“Hey.”

Orphen was listening to their conversation, he then spoke in a low tone.

“Be quiet.....”

He stared out the window. Everyone in the local vicinity was now aware that something happened, even the animals in the forest were startled. Orphen could faintly see the ghost in the distance, its elongated eyes peering back at him. Neither of them blinked once, slippery scales then started to appear all over the ghost’s skin——

“.....A snake? This is strange.”

Orphen didn’t have any energy to respond to Majic’s words. It did resemble a snake, the lower part of the body and the head were snakelike, but below the thin neck there was a pair of human shoulders.

“A snake man.”

Vulcan shouted, dressed in pyjamas with his sword ready. Orphen then heard something hit the ground behind him, looking back, he saw Cleo lying on the floor.

“Sword of light——”

Orphen straightened his body, ready to cast magic. But before he could, the snake man disappeared all of a sudden.

“What?”

As soon as the snake man disappeared, everyone could sense his departure.

“Ahhhhhhh!!”

Orphen collapsed to the ground, trying to forget something.

Then suddenly——

“Ah!”

Majic screamed behind him. A couple of arrows were sticking into the mattress.

“My, my.....”

Orphen was back to himself again, he was in high spirits. He didn’t think the snake man shot arrows at them, so it must have been human beings.

With that in mind, Orphen jumped towards the window for a moment——it was likely that he would be shot, but he didn’t think so, since it would be hard to hit someone in the dark.

Thud! He jumped through the hole in the wall on the second floor, landing perfectly on the ground. All around him he heard the chirping of insects, he looked around for the culprit.

(If I was an assassin I would be——)

Orphen stuck out his hand towards the small forest beside the hotel entrance.

(Hiding at the front entrance!)

“Sword of Light, whom I do release!”

A tree and parts of the hotel's porch were set alight. At the same time, a deep and rough voice spoke:

"Disappear!"

All the flames from the previous attack vanished.

(Is that—the assassin?)

Someone how the assassin was able to negate Orphen's attack, the implications of who this might be ran through his mind.

A figure stepped out of the trees, it looked like he was ready to flee.

Orphen couldn't let any of them get away, since they would most likely tell Ostwald about what happened tonight.

Orphen took a deep breath, crossed his arms and shouted:

"I call thee, sisters of rupture!"

At the same time—he pointed towards his chosen destination. The air itself started to vibrate, it felt like the air was being squeezed from all directions, then an explosion occurred.

"Ahh!"

"Ahh!"

He heard several screams coming from the trees—two men armed with bow and arrows fell and landed on the ground.

(I doubt that's all of them.)

Orphen walked calmly towards the two men. He kicked one in the head, he fainted. The other man was moaning, Orphen got on his knees and grabbed him by the chest.

"Did Ostwald send you? Did he?!"

The assassin was scarred out of his wits, he couldn't speak.

"Well, seeing as you won't answer that question. I'll ask you another—did you see that snake creature?"

"Death, death....."

The assassin seemed confused.

"A ghost appeared in the house, did——"

"We were——"

It seemed the assassin's right shoulder was broken, he went on to say:

"We were waiting for you to fall asleep, we were——"

Reeling from the pain, he bit his lip.

"Planning a night raid."

Orphen felt like he was hiding something from him.

"So, you didn't have anything to do with that ghost?"

“Ahhhhhh!”

Someone screamed——

It was the man who Orphen kicked in the head. He was holding a knife, and was pressing it against his own head, blood was oozing out.

“Ah——ahhh——ahh!”

Orphen rushed over, but it was too late. The assassin had already cut into his own skull——his skull could be clearly seen, blood was pouring out.

“Ah——ahhh!”

Screams were now coming from the other man, both of them were screaming. He was grasping at his throat, it looked like he was suffocating himself——this was insanity. Several times Orphen had seen people die, but this was too much, too strange.

Orphen took a step backwards. Then he felt something on touch shoulder, it was like tree bark, a little hot, a little hard.

“.....?”

Even though he was frightened, Orphen turned around. There was a tall figure standing behind him, the dark silhouette was clutching a large knife.

“Oh shit!”

Orphen flew into a panic. He was about to take a defensive stance, but then he noticed it——there was a finger right in front of his eyes.

But——it just sat there motionlessly.

(.....?)

Orphen didn't know when it happened. Was it when he blinked? He put the thought out of his mind, all he could focus on was the mad grin on this persons face. His basic instincts told him to blink again, maybe if he closed his eyes it would go away.

Orphen closed his eyes.

Not long after he closed his eyes, he felt something hugging him——it was a woman, he was gently caressed for a moment, then she let go. Orphen opened his eyes. His mind was now free from disorder, he was calm once again. It was like cold water was poured over his head, it wasn't an unpleasant feeling for him.

Then, a pair of lips was pressed upon his.

“Hirietta.....?”

Orphen liked this feeling, he wanted it to last forever.

“Your body surgery technique is really powerful, did you learn it at the *Tower*?”

“Body surgery?”

Orphen was stunned for a moment. His heart was now throbbing, he was flustered.

“Even I can't kill people like that.....”

“Ah.”



“Didn’t you kill those men with some trick?”

“No.”

Orphen wiped the sweat from his forehead.

“I didn’t do anything to them.”

“That’s not what it looked like.”

“Listen, I——”

Before he could say anything else, the front door of the hotel opened.

“Orphen!”

“Master!”

Majic and Cleo came running towards them. Noticing the presence of Hirieta, Cleo became angry.

“Orphen——”

Cleo was about to ask him something, but he put his hand up to silence her.

Orphen looked back at Hirieta, her hair straight and beautiful. Then he looked at Cleo, her entire appearance disorderly.

“You jumped from that window alone! That was suicidal!”

Orphen put his hand on Cleo’s shoulder, he then pushed her out of the way and headed towards the hotel.

“Where’s that stupid raccoon dog?”

He asked Majic, Majic shrugged.

“Vulcan and Dortin are parading around the room, they’re calculating how much it’ll cost to repair the room.”

“.....”

Orphen sighed. Hirieta approached him from behind.

“What are you going to do next?”

“I don’t know.”

She looked at him.

“Orphen?”

“What?”

Orphen asked. Hirieta came closer and whispered in his ear.

“Before you do anything, you should rub that off?”

“Rub what off?”

“My lipstick on your lips, silly.”

Hirietta laughed, Orphen's face was now bright red, as he wiped the lipstick with the back of his hand.

Chapter 3 – Stupid Rumours

Orphen felt desperate—the is what he felt like as he patrolled the messy room. The wardrobe was twisted beyond recognition, wax from the candlestick was all over the floor, the iron that held the bed together was bent, a burning smell came from the wallpaper, and Vulcan had kicked in the door. The compensation that would have to be payed would be extraordinary, he didn't want to know the exact amount. Orphen had more important things to deal with, even if he wanted to leave, he had a plan ready.

The day after, Orphen was brought to the local Police station for interrogation.

“What a disaster. Ahem, how much compensation can you pay?”

“Ah?”

Orphen was confused. Because he knew the amount would be extraordinary,

(He asked me how much? Does he even know if I can pay?)

Orphen was surprised, he then tried to talk as calmly as he could.

“Well, I'm not too familiar with that kind of thing. What was it priced on the market?”

“Market...price?”

The old white haired officer slightly moved his skinny lips. He was wearing a brown vest, and had the face of a kind old man. In the corner of the cramped office there was a coat hanger, a large wide brim hat sat on top. The only furniture was a small wooden table, the man put his old thin elbows on the table, his lacklustre eyes staring at Orphen.

“Three years ago, a woman staying in that room awakened a ghost.”

Orphen crossed his arms, and suddenly thought——

(That man, he said Fonogorosu.....)

This whole ordeal requires a detailed investigation. But who should he ask?

After what happened last night, there was an official investigation into the disturbance. Knowing this, Orphen wondered if they would dig up any worth information.

Exiting the police station, he saw Majic squatting on the side of the road, he looked very happy to see him.

“Master!”

Orphen waved as he ran towards his student.

“I told you to wait at the hotel. Did something happen?”

“No, it's just——”

Majic's eyes blinked with hesitation.

“We.....simply can't stay there.”

“.....?”

Majic sighed.

“While you were away, that person called Hiriетta went to get something to eat in the hotel.....and then——”

“What happened?”

“Cleo was there, she was sitting at a table. I don’t know if they said anything, but both of them were staring at each other.”

“This is just great.”

Orphen and Majic simultaneously sighed.

Last night in the hotel, it was extraordinarily quiet. After what happened, they had boarded up the broken window and wall with wood. Other than that, it was the same as the day before.

The entrance of the hotels eating area was pushed open, the air was quiet and cold. In the middle of the room was a table, Hiriетta with her full body leather outfit was staring into Cleo’s eyes. She looked angry, so did Cleo, but oddly her cheeks looked a little swollen. She was wearing a shirt, the buttons were out of place, there was a knocked over chair lying on the floor——if Orphen didn’t know any better, they had a catfight.

After Orphen opened the door, Hiriетta gently smiled. As for Cleo, her body didn’t move, her blond hair was obscuring her injury.

“I want to——”

Just as Orphen spoke, Cleo kicked the foot of her chair and knocked it over as she stood up. Her face contorted as she angrily shouted at him.

“Idiot!”

She then turned to head upstairs. Orphen watched her every move, until she disappeared from his view. Behind him, Majic quietly said:

“I’ve never seen her so angry. Have you, Master?”

“Oh, really?”

Hiriетta spoke——as she touched a black scabbard beside her right leg.

“What do you mean by that?”

Orphen said, as he slowly approached the table.

Hiriетta didn’t look at him.

“I think that kid has the right to know. You still haven’t told her the truth, right?”

Orphen picked up the chair Cleo kicked over, he then sat down. Hiriетta went on to say:

“I told her, that I was a professional anti-sorcerer assassin, and that I was hired to kill you. You should have seen the look on her face.”

When Majic heard those words, he took a few steps backward, bumping into a table behind him.

“One thing lead to another and I hit her, you’re lucky that’s all I did.”

"You shouldn't have done that, it was my call to make."

Orphen said, Hirieta simply laughed.

"How can a first-class black sorcerer be worried about a little girl, it's very unbecoming of one such as yourself."

Orphen then looked over to Majic.

"Go upstairs. Tell her not to worry."

Immediately, Majic raised his hand and said:

"B-But Master, I can't do that!"

"I'll owe you one."

Orphen winked at him, and said:

"It's far too dangerous for her to be left alone, that spirit that attacked last night could come back."

".....She's still upset, I don't know if I'll be able to calm her down."

Majic whined, as he went upstairs. Orphen and Hirieta went into the kitchen, since it was morning, the fires weren't lit, and it was a little dark.

"I just want to ask you one thing."

"What is it?"

Orphen said, as he leaned backwards.

"Are you an enemy.....or friend?"

"Can't you distinguish from friend and foe?"

She jokingly said.

"Okay, I'm not an enemy. Though if there's a ploy against you, I'll provide you the necessary information."

"Well then, out with it."

"You're really impatient. Don't you want to talk some more?"

"No."

"What's wrong, didn't you enjoy that passionate kiss yesterday?"

"Enough flirting. Let's get down to business."

Hirieta put her elbows down on an old mottled table.

"Alright.....I hope you're still willing to meet my client."

"How do I know I can trust you?"

"Fine. If you don't trust me then you can forget about it."

Listening to her, Orphen wanted to say something sarcastic, but then he remembered something. When he looked at her, he thought of the name *Foolish Dog* Hirieta, he had heard all kinds of rumours about her, he didn't know what to believe.

"By the way, you should know this about my client. He's dead, he's been dead for a long time, and I was the one who killed him. But he still exists.....in this village."

"He's such an idiot!"

In the back room, Cleo was angrily shouting, she took a pillow from the bed, threw it into the air, and kicked it. The room was unlike any other, mostly because it had no wallpaper and it was a mess.

Cleo then picked up the pillow, sat on it and started staring at the wall.

"You idiot.....of all the people to engage with!"

Outside the window came a cry.

"All right, we're all done!"

It was the voice of Vulcan. Cleo's eyebrows move a little, she calmed herself down and went towards the window. Putting her hands on the windowsill, she could see Vulcan standing under the window. From Cleo's position you could only see his head, from the sound of his voice, it seemed he was in a good mood. Behind Vulcan was Dortin, he didn't look like he was having fun.

Cleo didn't know much about Vulcan and Dortin, all she knew was that they owed Orphen money.

Five children stood in front of Vulcan, they looked around ten years old.

"Okay! It's time for all of you to join and run my new commerce guild! Fear will keep you together!"

Without looking behind him, Vulcan took Dortin's sword and pointed it into the air.

"Times are tough, but we've got to make a living somehow!"

Cleo put her hand over her mouth, she almost busted out laughing. The little children winked to each other, as Vulcan was giving his speech.

"Those who suffocate easily from sweeping chimneys are excluded from the group! Everyone must be careful not to get sick, and——"

Cleo closed the window.

"Those guys sure do like to have a good time."

(But then again, I can kind of relate.....)

She wondered when she began to change—even since she left home, she could feel something eating away at her, she couldn't help but just worry about it.



(When did it all start to go wrong.....)

She thought, as she looked at the ceiling.

(I know Orphen is technically my guardian while travelling, after all, I am a minor. I just feel like he won't let me bear some of the responsibilities...)

She then spoke:

"As long as Orphen agrees, I could be a competent partner, helping him out with his work."

Tap, tap, someone knocked on the door.

"Cleo, it's me.....can I come in?"

"Yeah."

When the door opened, it was Majic who entered. Cleo was slightly disappointed.

(I thought it would be him.....)

Cleo's heartbeat intensified, a jealous flame arose in her eyes.

(That idiot, how dare he look down upon me! This is all because I can't learn magic.)

The blonde girl gave Majic a sharp look, he was frozen with fear.

".....This is troublesome."

A few kilometres away from the village in the forest, a man whispered. He looked around 30, he had unkempt hair and a stubble. He was wearing combat fatigues——hidden behind his clothing was a chain that was specifically used to deal with sorcerers, around his waist was a knife. He pulled out the knife and examined it, it reminded himself of how many times he'd been scarred by knives.

However, this wasn't the one man in the area, several men approached him from behind——their ages and uniforms were not consistent, it was clear this was a gathering of assassins. One of them replied:

".....What's the matter, Mr. Kozen?"

"The other party failed to assassinate the target. We must remain vigilant, we've got to wait for the proper time to attack. But first, we've got to find his whereabouts, it shouldn't be hard."

"Indeed.....though he is from the Tower of Fang, so——"

Another assassin timidly said.

"Are you saying the other's asked for it?"

"Well, it seems apparent."

"I admit that sorcerer is a crafty man."

Kozen put his hand on his chin, and pulled a hair off.

“Listen, he may be from the Tower of Fang, but that doesn’t mean you should believe every rumour you hear about him. I don’t believe he’s as powerful as they say. After all, he’s got such a silly name——Orphen, what a terrible pun.”

“Even so, to deal with an enemy like him……”

“Enough. No matter how powerful he is, he’s too young to have perfected his combat skills. His lack of courage and experience will be his downfall.”

One of the men with long hair looked at his right arm, it was wrapped in bandages. He was knocked out of the tree by Orphen, he saw him interrogate his comrades. He didn’t agree with the others.

“You didn’t see him last night, he——”

The long haired man half finished his sentence, he suddenly started having a spasm.

“_____?”

All the people around him watched in amazement. They saw the long haired man’s eyes widen, he acted like a ventriloquist’s doll.

“Ah——ah——”

His hands went to his throat, as he said:

“I’ve——found——you——”

It was an unusual situation, but the assassin’s reaction was very fast. Kozen stuck out his hand and said:

“Open!”

A sharp whirlwind struck the man, it opened up a large wound from left shoulder to his right abdomen. A large amount of blood shot out from the opening, enough to fill a bucket. Then, the man stumbled to the ground, he wasn’t getting up again.

Then……from his wound, what looked like a black fog, crawled out of his corpse——it slowly started to take human form.

“What the hell?”

A slender assassin cried out. A knife trembling in his hand, as he stared into the black void.

“Finally——I’ve——found you——Fonogorosu!”

“F-Fono?”

Kozen was baffled.

“Fonogorosu——the debt——must be——repaid!”

“Begone!”

Kozen desperately shouted the incantation. He stretched forth his hand, and lighting flew straight towards the foggy figure, it disrupted the black mist for a moment, but after a few seconds, it reformed itself.

“Damn it——”

“It’s a ghost!”

An assassin shouted. Then——

“Ah.....?”

The slender man uttered. He looked down at his chest, he could see blood all over his torso. At the same time, other shouts rang out.

“It hurts!”

Men were falling to the ground, some guy’s ankle disappeared, everyone was terrified.

“What the hell is going on?”

Men were covered in blood, nobody knew what was happening.

Kozen looked around, everyone was scared.

In this situation, magic was useless.

“It’s not a ghost, it’s——”

Turning around to the few that were remaining, he shouted:

“It’s a monster!”

It was useless, they were all dead quiet, and they were standing still. Then he noticed it, there was some type of corrosive acid burning away at their heads, one guy had half a head left.

“Damn it!”

Kozen ran away as fast as he could. Behind him, he could hear the falling of men, and the slicing of feet.

Chapter 4 - Stupid confession

(Everyone has a past.)

This was true, though some people would rather forget about their past.

Orphen looked around the dark hall, he breathed deeply. The windows were closed, and the room was very dusty, so dusty that your footprints could be clearly seen. He was in the hall of a big house, he gazed upwards to a tall majestic statue. This statue is a goddess that is worshiped all over the continent, a thin smile was engraved on its face.

“This *Goddess*.....”

Orphen said to himself. He then held out his arm, and patted some dust off his trousers.

“Hmm?” Hirieta said, standing near Orphen.

“What?”

“Nothing.....I just admire the owner of this house, he clearly has good taste.”

Orphen smiled. He stared at the middle of the statue's face, it looked like someone took a chisel to its face, and it made the goddess look like she had three eyes. In the middle of those gentle eyes, there was a hole, a third eye...

Hirieta closed the door behind them, the house was then plunged into darkness. Then, Hirieta lit a portable gas lamp.

The statue was illuminated once again.

(Everyone has a past.)

Orphen repeated this in his head, of course, the same could be said about the gods. The eldest daughter of the goddess' represents the past—the second daughter of the goddess' represents the present—finally, the third female goddess represents the future.

The sisters of fate, the fate of the three sisters, their future is their own. But for humans, theirs is unknown. They could die today or tomorrow, anything is possible.

Orphen wore a self-deprecating smile, he was feeling sentimental. Standing in the light of Hirieta's portable gas lantern, he spoke:

“I didn't expect to be taken to a place like this.”

“My client wants to meet you face to face, I'll be taking you to him.”

“I'd like to know something first——”

Orphen then looked towards the ceiling, he only saw darkness hovering above him.

“What are you in this for? Are you looking for someone?”

“You're from the Tower of Fang.....aren't you, Krylancelo?”

As soon as Orphen heard that name, he turned around to face Hirieta. Her face was full of mischief, her brown eyes flickered.

“I'm looking for a man, the strongest black sorcerer on this continent.....Childman, his name is known all over the land.”

“Don’t say his name.”

Orphen wanted her to stop. But it seemed Hirieta wasn’t done yet.

“However, five years ago he left the *Tower of Fang* for an unknown reason. There’s all sorts of rumours flying around, they say that he was deemed too powerful for the elders to handle, so they sent the *Thirteen Apostles* after him. Anyway, that’s just a rumour.”

She then winked at him.

“In the western side of the continent, he went on a search for a missing person, even though that person was said to be dead. The Demon Sorceress——”

“Shut your mouth!”

Orphen was getting impatient, he grabbed Hirieta’s arm. He desperately wanted to hold back his feelings, but he couldn’t.

“Don’t call me Krylancelo! Starting five years ago, I became Orphen. I left the Tower of Fang because I wanted to. Also, that name——”

Hirieta wasn’t intimidated by his scowl. In fact, she was enjoying this. Orphen went on to say:

“Every name has a meaning. I am Orphen, Krylancelo no longer exists! No matter who calls me by that name.....I won’t accept it.”

Orphen said his piece, he was ready to let go of her hand——but Hirieta’s hands were faster than his, she put her other hand on top of his.

“You are like a chirping bird, except no one is listening.”

“And you are nothing but foolish dog Hirieta! Unable to complete a mission Hirieta! Of course, you tell people these are nothing but lies, but it’s the truth. You always betray ninety percent of the people you work with. If you are commissioned to kill someone, you’d help them escape. If you are assigned to escort someone, you’d disappear and leave them. The only thing you are good at is killing sorcerers.”

“.....I know.”

Hirieta agreed with him. She gently let go of his hand.

“Alright, let’s continue walking. We’re going.....to an underground room, okay?”

“Achoo.”

“.....”

Orphen found it strange to see her this way, she was blushing. Using the faint light of the gas lamp, they made their way around the house.

This house had been abandoned a decade ago. When people lived here, they had their servants clean every part of the house until it was spotless. The owner of the house had no relatives, he lived together with a few servants and assistants.

However—that time had long since passed. It was dark, they could hear a sharp cry and the tapping of little feet, there was probably a large group of mice nearby. Orphen brushed multiple large cobwebs out of their path.

Hirietta's mood then changed.

"You know—if you go west from here, you can find a village that's not on the map. The locals call it Rain Dust, that means the debris of the times, it also refers to the residents who live there. Simply put, their homeland was destroyed by sporadic fighting. They've had to rely on their own strength to survive.....over time, they unknowingly formed a village, that's where my home is."

Upon hearing this, Orphen muttered:

".....Funny, my hometown is also in that area."

"Your hometown? You call yourself Orphen, do that mean you were an orphan?"

Hirietta was surprised. Orphen took a deep breath, and said:

"I don't generally like to talk about my past, but this time was an exception."

She shrugged.

"When I left the village, I was just a boring fifteen year old—simply put, I ran away from home with a simple bag. I kept running until I reached another village, this village....."

"Fifteen years old....."

Orphen said out aloud, he then looked at Hirietta and tried to guess her age.

"I see, so did this happen ten years ago?"

"You're wrong. It was nine years ago——"

"We're not that different..."

Orphen said. Hirietta laughed——

"Sometimes the difference can be very big."

She said, but then she seemed sad. Orphen looked at her, then a bug dropped on him from above, he started scratching his head.

"If I left the village a year later, I probably would have never met him."

"Him?"

Orphen said, as he tried to get rid of the spider in his hair.

"Yes. I fainted when I reached this village, he took care of me...Sami."

Just as she said that name, his mouth suddenly shut. Orphen didn't say anything, but he remembered that name from somewhere.

At the same time, he got the spider and threw it to a group of rats behind him, there was lots of noise as they fought over it.

They had been walking in the house for a while—they had walked down a small hallway until they reached the kitchen, they then came to a pair of stairs leading to the cellar.

"If you came here a year later, how would you not meet this Sami?"

Hirietta's answer was very simple.

"That's because.....he died a year after I met him."

(.....This guy, since he's dead, I shouldn't encroach upon this touchy subject.)

Both of them slowly went down the stairs silently.

Because the rainy season had just passed, the staircase was wet—not just wet, but hot. Orphen realized this when he touched the wall, he wiped his hands on his leather trousers. The further down the got, the thicker the moisture became.

Orphen felt that his patience had reached his limit.

"I say, what happened to this Sami guy?"

When Hirietta answered, she didn't look back—he didn't know what her expression was.

"He was the assistant to the owner of this house. The owner was from the Tower of Fang, he was exiled to this village.....his name was Fonogrosu."

When she finished, they had reached the end of the stone stairs.

Ahead of them was an iron door. Hirietta extinguished the gas lamp.

Darkness consumed them.

".....What are you doing?"

Orphen casually asked. Hirietta took a deep breath, and shrugged her shoulders.

Her hands reached for the door, she found the handle and opened it. The heavy door emitted a loud creaking sound, a gust of wind flew out of the room as she opened it.

The air smelled terrible, it was rancid water.

Looking into the room, they saw a faint light. It looked like a huge ball of fireflies, but there was nothing holding it in the air.

On the right hand side of the room, there was three layers of wooden boxes. They were arranged very neatly—it was one meter tall, the boxes looked very strong, and were tightly sealed. Then...

"This is the manufacture date? Red Light Emperor thirty-eighth year.....a decade ago?"

This surprised Orphen, Hirietta had a serious look on her face, she was biting her lip.

Orphen then navigated his way through the boxes until the basement became very narrow, he saw a another very large box——

No, it wasn't a box——Orphen was stunned for a moment, it was a huge glass sink, it was backed up against the wall, and was about two meters high. All the sides of the sink were covered in moss, some places seemed to have been cleaned. The sink was also full of water, Orphen didn't dare look into it.

"Here it is——"

Hirietta's demeanour changed as she entered the room. She reached for the ball of light.

“Here is Fonogorosu’s.....niches?”

“Niches?”

Orphen said. Then——

“That’s right.”

A reply came from the sink.

“You finally came. I’ve been waiting a long time for you to come.....I am Kiev Fonogorosu, the exiled researcher from the Tower of Fang.”

“This is Vulcan’s first chamber of commerce meeting! I’ll become rich by collecting drops pieces of metal from the ground!”

On a white sheet, several characters were written, he turned it into a flag. Vulcan walked forward with five children tailing behind him, they kept staring at the road.

It was a scorching afternoon, Vulcan walked with the children and picked up any scraps they could find, everything they found they sold.

Now there was a queue in front of Vulcan, it was more children who wanted to join his business. Meanwhile, Dortin was with three children who were putting bent nails and other metal scraps into the wooden box. He didn’t know how much all of the junk would be worth on the market, but one thing he did know was that it won’t be good. A few days later, Dortin was tortured by Vulcan for sleeping on the job, it was unavoidable.

Then, they noticed two familiar faces coming towards them. One of them was wearing a light blue shirt and jeans, it was Cleo. The other person was wearing all black, he was a teenager. Dortin searched in the depths of his memory for his name.

(.....Um...Magic, right? He’s a student of that loan shark.)

The two people noticed them, and ran across the road towards them. Cleo raised her slender hand and said:

“Hi.”

“.....Hello there.”

Dortin stopped to say hello. Vulcan and his "chamber of commerce" slowly disappeared.

“Out for a walk?”

“No.....we’re looking for Orphen. He suddenly disappeared.”

Cleo said, as she sighed.

“I haven’t seen him today. Have you checked with the police?”

“Yeah, but he went out with that assassin and never came back.”

Those last few words sounded very forced. Dortin was intrigued by the mention of an “assassin”.

“Assassin?”

Majic replied:

“Ah——that——no, that tall and long haired woman, she appeared in our hotel room the other night.”

“That person, I remember.....”

Dortin tried to remember what he could.

Cleo glanced towards Majic and whispered:

“We need to hurry and find Orphen——that woman, she was sent to kill Orphen. She has weapons with her, remember?”

(Compared to an assassin, I’m more afraid of Orphen than an assassin.....)

“I’ll help you find——”

Dortin was saying, then suddenly——

“Ahhhhhh!”

Someone screamed.

Looking forward, they saw Vulcan fall to the ground clutching his flag——a man knocked him down, the other children scattered.

“Out of the way!”

The man shouted as he ran, everyone calmly watched him. He had a short beard, and looked like he was old.

He then tripped and went flying towards Cleo, she deflected his approach with a spin kick, and her foot struck him directly in the nose.

Majic who was standing next to Cleo began to shout.

“Ah, he’s bleeding!”

Blood was spewing from the man’s nose, he then exclaimed:

“What are you doing?!”

“Shut up!”

Cleo rushed over to the man, he was getting up from the ground.

“What are you doing?! You appeared out of nowhere and almost trampled the kids!”

“He was running scared, he just happened to run into them.....”

Majic whispered, Cleo looked back at him, she didn’t care for his opinion.

“Listen, little girl——now is not the time to be talking!”

The man waved his arm, as he stood up.

Seeing that the box was overturned and the metal scraps were everywhere, the little children desperately tried to gather them. Meanwhile, Vulcan was wailing senselessly.

In short, no one was injured. Then, Cleo began to shout:

“Now is certainly not the time to talk! We’ve got to protect Orphen from that promiscuous assassin!”

“Promiscuous?”

Majic said, his eyes half open.

Hearing this, the man quickly grabbed Cleo’s wrist.

“An assassin? I’ve got no time to babysit you kids——”

He stooped mid-way, as if he remembered something.

“Did you just say, Orphen?”

Cleo tried to shake his grasp.

“Don’t touch me, nosebleed man!”

Whack! Cleo headbutted the man.

“Ahhh!”

The short bearded man fell to the ground once again.

“You are so annoying!”

Cleo said, then she let Majic take a look at her head.

“Hey, are you okay?”

Dortin said as he ran towards the man, he could tell that he was obviously the victim here.

He pressed down on the man’s nose, he groaned.

“You asshole——dirty bitch, you won’t get away from Kozen the shadow——”

It seemed that the man’s name was. Dortin asked him once again:

“Are you okay?”

“Uh-huh, by the way, got any toilet paper?”

“I’m sorry. No.”

Kozen groaned as he stood up, he then pulled out a knife. When Cleo saw this, she stepped backwards.

“Come on, there’s no need for something like that.”

“I don’t like to fight with women and children, but I can’t ignore what you’ve done.”

Kozen stepped towards Cleo.

“Can’t you just forgive me this one time, Mr. Nosebleed? it was just a joke.”

“You better draw your sword!”

Kozen said, as he waved the knife at her.

“Actually, seeing that you are affiliated with Orphen, I should take you hostage!”

"Uh——"

Dortin looked at Kozen and said:

"Is this really the right time for that sort of thing?"

"Uhm....."

Kozen stood frozen for a moment, he had made his decision.

Then, suddenly a crowd started to gather. The children's parents came after they heard the children crying loudly. Vulcan couldn't find a safe place to hide, so he just watched with the rest of the crowd. He also shouted:

"Have no fear! The security of the business is guaranteed by that guy with the glasses!"

(Is he talking about me?)

Cleo then hid behind Majic, and shouted:

"Orphen was right, you must be one of those assassins he talked about....."

"Master said that more than one person wanted him dead, Cleo."

Majic frowned, as he looked at Cleo.

However, Kozen was enraged.

"How dare you lump me in with those guys! Unlike them, I've made a name for myself!"

"Well, sounds like you're pretty famous."

"Of course! I am the ash mercenary, the shadow which runs to the coast——Kozen!"

Dortin took a fighting posture, and said:

"You're about to kidnap someone, your name will be in the newspaper....."

"That, and we've seen your face."

"Shut up!"

Majic said, he didn't want this to end bloody.

"Come on guys, calm down. Let's all count down from ten, nine, eight, seven, six....."

".....?"

The assassin thought this was stupid. Majic closed his eyes, and slowly counted down.

"Five, four, three, two, one——"

After the countdown of ended, the young blond boy shouted:

"Sword of Light, whom I do release!"

Majic extended his hand, a white flash of light flew out and struck Kozen.

".....What?"

Majic looked at his hand.

"Looks like I wasn't concentrating properly."

“You’re useless.”

Cleo said, as she grabbed Majic’s shoulder.

“Who’s useless? At least I tried to do something.”

“You little bastard, how dare you try something like that.”

(Crap!)

Kozen shouted, as he charged Majic with his single-handed sword. But Cleo was faster, she met Kozen’s attack before it struck Majic, she used her sword to shield him.

Dortin was watching the whole thing, he wondered what he could do—but there wasn’t enough time. He remembered that one time where he read a book about people fighting, one of the men was cut down as soon as he pulled out his weapon. But he didn’t know if this fight would end the same way.

Cleo had been trained to use a sword—but now the assassin had disarmed her, it would be impossible for her to win if she fought without a weapon. Even Majic couldn’t do anything to stop the assassin, simply put, they were on the verge of despair.

The only thing Dortin could do is throw stones, that’s the best he can do in this situation.

(Damn it.)

Dortin picked up a stone off the street, he threw it in the direction of the assassin. After a few seconds, the assassin cried out in pain.

It was then that they saw the back of the assassin, it had disappeared. Though if you looked closer, you could see a black shadow covering his entire back. Kozen collapsed onto the ground, and started twitching wildly.

“Damn it, it followed me!”

“Ah.....”

Dortin looked around to the others—the children and their parents had run away. Their positions were taken by other onlookers.

“What’s going on?”

Cleo said slowly. No one answered. No one wanted to answer.

Then suddenly—black armour encased the assassin and sent him flying into the air, then it pummelled him into the ground, he didn’t move after that.

A hole then appeared in Kozen’s shoulder, and a black mist poured out.

The mist started to take a human shape, then someone in the crowd shouted:

“It’s the curse of Fonogorosu!”

With this cry, the crowd started to scream and run away. Dortin could hear the dead spectre whispering something.

“You—yesterday I didn’t notice you—you sorcerer!”

The ghost took on the appearance of a nervous young man, it turned to Majic, and said:

“Find him—find Fonogorosu!”

“Aren’t you Fonogorosu?”

The spectre ignored him, it just raised its arms and cried:

“The debt must be repaid!”

Boom!

A gust of wind was sent out in all directions—for a moment, it was like the area was stuck by a small tornado. Dortin watched as the villagers ran around in a panic, shouting, screaming, and shouting all kinds of things.

Then, the winds stopped.

The crowd was gone, Vulcan was lying on the ground, but the assassin, Cleo, and Majic were gone, the black armour and spectre was too.

“How.....how did I get myself into this?”

Dortin sat on the ground, he didn’t know what to do. He fixed his crooked glasses, and said:

“This is a great day, an assassin and a ghost appears.....when did it all go wrong?”

This sentence didn’t make much sense, but it was the only thing that came to mind for Dortin.

He then slowly approached his brother Vulcan, who was lying on the ground.

“Brother, brother, brother.”

Dortin started to shake Vulcan.

“Cleo and Majic, they’re gone!”

Vulcan sat up, and began rubbing his head, while saying:

“Hmm.....it seems the ghost captured them.”

“Oh.....”

Dortin looked around. He seemed to think of something.

“.....I think we should tell that loan shark.....”

He didn’t say his name. But Vulcan knew who he was talking about, he reluctantly said:

“I just know he’ll blame us.”

“He might not cause trouble for us.....”

Vulcan ignored him.

“You know how he is, he’ll probably try and shove a shake down our throats.”

“But it wasn’t our fault.”

“Obviously.”

Vulcan sighed, then both of them looked upwards into the sky.

“Kiev.....Fonogorosu?”

Orphen said, with a hand on his chin. The sink was covered in moss, he couldn't see what was inside.

“My father——Kiev Fonogorosu, do you know him?”

There was an eerie noise coming from the sink——if you looked carefully, you could see the sound was coming from an elongated cylindrical tube above the sink.

He looked back, Hirietta rushed towards him.

“Is it alright if I leave?”

“Why?”

Although she asked, it seemed he knew in advance that she would say such a thing——she squinted one eye, and gave him the same mischievous smile as usual.

Orphen slowly sighed.

“The next part is to be spoken only between members of the Tower of Fang.”

“Okay.”

He agreed, and she left the room. Leaving behind a heavy thud of the closing door.

Orphen then turned around to face the sink.

“I don't know much about Fonogorosu, all I know is that talk about him and his work was made taboo by the elders...”

He fiddled with his dragon pendant——proof that he was from the Tower of Fang.

“My teacher, he expressed interest in Fonogorosu's research for some time. I have seen some information.”

“For some time?”

Orphen irritably scratched his head, and said:

“Fonogorosu's research, he wanted to elevate human kind to another existence. My teacher, Childman——”

He paused for a moment, thinking about what he would say next.

“He said that when Fonogorosu was born, he was more advanced than any other human. He had the intelligence of a few hundred year old geniuses.”

“I see.....”

The sink was intrigued by this information.

“If that is true, father probably would not have completed his work. But that's where you're wrong, his research wasn't about brining humanity to a higher plane of existence.”

“What did you say?”

“Because of his findings, Kiev Fonogorosu’s research was not recognized by the Tower of Fang——every night he repeated this. He...”

The tone of the sink’s voice changed, it now spoke quietly.

“He was able to overcome the Dragon Race and make a fighting biological organism.”

“Able to overcome the Dragon Race, biological.....”

Orphen repeated.

“About the Dragon——”

When the sink spoke next, it was almost poetic:

“In ancient times——when the gods on this continent had magic, there was six races who stole their magic. Afterwards, humans gained the ability to use magic from mixed race breeding with the heavenly beings.....their descendants, my father and you among others.....gained the ability to use magic.”

“Your father and me?”

Orphen said.

“Can you use magic?”

“No. Although I am the child of my father, I did have the potential to use magic. But my father didn’t give me the relevant training, he was too busy with his work.”

The voice now spoke in a self-deprecating manner.

“So.....there’s no way for me to deal with a man-made beast.”

(Man-made beast.....)

Orphen said in his head, he wondered if everything that’s happened up to this point was because of this man-made beast. If so, then——

“Ah!”

Orphen snorted.

“Don’t be silly——there’s no way something that can be created is better than the magic of the Dragon Race, their fighting power is far beyond anything humans can imagine.”

“Then, you will survive, won’t you?”

The sink said calmly, then Orphen stopped talking. The room suddenly went quiet, the lights flickered.

“The man-made beast was only a test subject.....father wanted to phase it out in favour for a more powerful man-made beast. It could be said, that this is evolution. Did you know? Long ago——when humans got magical powers, they weren’t that powerful. But as time goes on, their strength continues to grow.....however, even now, they still cannot overcome the Dragon Race.”

“But there’s only so much humans can achieve. Recently, the number of powerful sorcerers have decreased when compared to the past.”

“All will be eliminated, at least I think so.”

The voice from the sink said in a quiet tone. Orphen became agitated as he looked at the tube above the sink, it was making noise—he saw that the tube went upwards through a hole in the ceiling, it must lead somewhere outside.

“The next step of human evolution, is not to save the past.....but to improve the present by sacrificing it. But such steps will not save the high level sorcerers from being born, at the present rate of evolution, such a tragedy cannot be avoided.....”

“Is this your father’s point of view?”

Orphen said, as he crossed his arms.

“Yes. Yes. My father wanted to challenge such a tragedy. That’s why accelerated evolution is needed.”

“I would like to say I have no interest in such a thing. But, because of these reasons the goddess’ in the hall are marked, it’s so sad, they were antiques.”

Orphen joked, but he didn’t get the response he wanted. The sink continued talking as if he said nothing.

“As a result, my father died. He really wanted to enhance human values, but in the end he couldn’t control the monster he created. Father called it a man-made beast, I called it a failure. Then in father’s study, he did something unimaginable.”

“.....In layman’s terms?”

“He did something foolish.”

The sink said flatly.

“It was criminal, dozens of people were sacrificed for his research.”

Orphen thought about the celebrity who built the Inn—and his tragic death outside the village. Although it didn’t matter, he had to ask.

“.....How many victims?”

“Just count the number of wooden boxes.”

Orphen looked at the pile of wooden boxes. At first glance—there was likely more than a dozen, but less than twenty.

“A box for animals—snakes, rabbits. Three *elements* were put in the box, simply put, a body was wrapped in two or three monster eggs. I don’t know the production methods, but father wanted to investigate the artificial creation of an animals fighting ability, he conducted human trials in secret. He would open the boxes from time to time, watching the parasite eat the body and grow to full size. This was the only way to keep an uncountable monster.”

“Wait, hold on a second——”

Orphen thought of something.

“Wouldn’t this process result in all kinds of monster?”

“Yes. For example, a huge snake.”

“Ahhhh!”

Orphen remembered something from yesterday, he saw Dortin come into his room with a wooden box, it had a large snakeskin in it.

When Orphen told the sink this, it wasn't pleased.

"I see——Hirietta never mentioned this, nor did she speak of any man-made beasts in the village....."

"Well..."

"That wooden box——my father called that artificial beast's box...Pandora's Box. Some of his other experiments are unaccounted for, some were lost in the disturbances, some were most likely stolen by thieves.....this room, even if something was taken right in front of me, I would be helpless. Your friend probably found one of the boxes which were thrown in the forest. I'm unsure if he let the creature out of it if it was already open, this is troubling....."

"Damn it!"

Orphen cried out, as he squatted on the ground.

"A monster——that stupid raccoon dog, one day I'll kill him!"

Of course, he'd have to recover his money first.

".....I see, there must be three of these man-made beasts in total. A spectre, a snake man, and a hand."

"The first one is Samii."

".....What?"

"As for the snake man, that's Kikyumu. The hand is.....Kenkurimu. Also, Accelerator might have been in the same box."

"What...the names don't matter!"

Numerous memories ran through Orphen's mind. Round and round, these memories circled him until he was forced to recognize them.

(Samii, he must have been Fonogorosu's assistant. Is that why he's a ghost, because Fonogorosu failed in his experiments. He sacrifice all those poor people, he secretly used humans in his trials.)

Orphen couldn't help but think of all the pain and suffering that Fonogorosu caused on those people.

"Fonogorosu transformed his assistants into terrible creatures!"

Orphen instinctively shouted.

The sink went silent——Orphen walked towards the sink covered in moss, he then punched the glass.

"Answer me! Did he succeed turning those people into specialized combat weapons!"

"Father——"

"Don't give me any of that crap!"

Orphen punched the sink again. This time he hurt his fist, it started bleeding.

"You aren't his son! You are Fonogorosu himself!"

He had no proof to back up his claim, but the sink didn't do anything to defend itself. Orphen went on to say:

"Fonogorosu may have had loved ones! But he hated humans, that's why he used them as test subjects! He transformed Samii into one of those creatures!"

".....If that's the case, then you should be able to handle them, after all you have received combat training as a sorcerer.....Krylancelo."

The sink said calmly, Orphen stopped hitting the sink, and took a step backwards.

"Based on the information Hirieta gave me.....I want to see if you can——help me dispose of the man-made beasts. You were thoroughly trained in the Tower of Fang, you have a variety of weapons in your arsenal. It's said that you can kill people with your bare hands, even if you don't remember, I bet your body still remembers those tricks. How is fighting a man-made beast any different than a person?"

"My teacher....."

Orphen clenched his dragon pendant, his voice now hoarse.

"My teacher, he was a genius. Just as tough as any monster. Even though he wanted his students to inherit his skills, but none of them were ever a match for him....."

He swallowed a mouthful of saliva, and went on to say:

"So he taught each student different things. I just happened to learn fighting techniques, but even so, he still wanted me to achieve more. He nurtured my abilities, not manufactured them. And——"

Orphen clenched his teeth.

"I am not Krylancelo, I am called Orphen!"

Just as he finished, he heard a noise——it came from above him.

".....Ahhhhhh....."

(Screaming?)

As he thought at that, suddenly——

From the hole above the sink, something fell and landed in the sink.

Muddy water flew out of the mossy sink, and hit the ceiling, Orphen couldn't help but shout.

"Sword of Light, whom I do release!"

A wave of light and heat hit the sink, it exploded. Glass fragments flew about the room and sewage poured onto the floor, Orphen then saw a familiar person in the sink.

"Majic!"

Orphen was covered in moss as he grabbed his apprentice from the water. Majic coughed for a while, you could clearly see there were tears in his eyes.

"Master! Where did you go?"

He cried. Orphen didn't know what to say, but he knew he had to apologize.



"I-I'm sorry."

"Sorry isn't good enough! Cleo's dead!"

".....What?"

Those words suddenly beat Orphen senseless. He pretended not to understand—he then saw something at his feet. Majic looked down too.

At his feet, was a big fish about two meters in length. From his point of view, it looked like a tuna. But this fish had features unlike any other he had seen, the fish had red gills which started to swell—it couldn't breathe, it lay there motionlessly.

The fishes belly—was white, it looked wrapped in shiny silver scales, and there was a human shape beneath the fish scales. It was like a snake swallowed someone, the fish's entire body was swollen like a snakes too. A nose and mouth was pressed against the skin, though you could only see the outline, it seemed this person and the fish were stuck together. It's mouth opened slightly, there was a hose in its mouth. The hose was long enough for anyone to see, it went from the fishes mouth to the sink.

But even now, the fish didn't move.

"What is this.....?"

Majic asked, as he pulled pieces of moss off him.

"What the hell. He transformed himself into an animal.....the fool."

".....Hey?"

"This was probably Ramon—or Fonogorosu.....I'm not sure.

Then.....

Orphen could feel the atmosphere change, the hairs stood up on the back of his neck.

From the ceiling came a blanket of darkness, it slowly came towards them.

"Did you think you could escape—Fonogorosu——"

He then looked at Majic, he was trembling.

"I saw an opportunity to escape, I jumped into the shaft.....but Cleo——"

He could not go on. Majic's eyes were filled with tears, he entire body was trembling.

"You're looking for Fonogorosu? Sorry, he's already dead."

But the spectre—Samii stubbornly shook his head and said:

"That man—that beast—wasn't Fonogorosu—— "

"Huh....."

(This isn't right.....what the hell is going on?)

Orphen clenched his fists, he didn't know what kind of magic would be useful against a spectre, only God knew.....

At that time, a voice came from behind Orphen—it was Hirieta, she said:

“Welcome, Orphen. Let me explain something——this is my real client. Samii.”

Chapter 5 – The Foolish Showdown

Sewage water flowed out from the broken sink onto the floor, the water flowed through the door opened by Hirieta. Orphen stood silently in the sewage water, staring at the “spectre”——Samii, as he calmly thought.

(According to the words of Fonogorosu, there should be a total of four man-made beasts.....)

Hirieta saw that he didn’t respond, so she started shouting:

“Fonogorosu created a large amount of man-made beasts. But Orphen.....his ultimate goal is to transform all of humanity.”

“So.....this guy was chosen as a test subject, am I right?”

Orphen slowly asked, as he looked at the spectre.

Hirieta stepped forward, her shoes making noise on the wet floor. She stood next to Orphen, and pulled a dagger from her scabbard.

“That’s right. His name is Samii. He was one of Fonogorosu’s assistants and lived with him. He was the last man-made beast that Fonogorosu made.....it is a cruel fate.”

“.....Does he retain the ability to think logically?”

Orphen stretched his right hand towards Hirieta, he gave her a threatening look. Hirieta’s face twisted for a moment.....then she shook her head.

“How could he. His mind and body are gone. He has long been mad, whenever he sees a sorcerer, he just can’t help but think it’s Fonogorosu. And thus——he attacks!”

At the same time she said that——Orphen grabbed Majic’s shoulder, and pulled him away from the sink. Hirieta also retreated across the room. A black fog soon filled the room, Orphen was trembling. Samii turned the air of the basement into a tornado, the air started to collide with everything in the room. Then suddenly——sonic boom! Everyone felt like they had just been hit with a hammer, numerous cracks appeared all over the walls.

Orphen staggered as he tried to regain his footing, and said:

“He’s not going to give us a chance to understand what’s going on. Get back.”

It seemed that the time for talking was over. The fog started to drift around the room again, but this time——it took a human form——

It rushed towards them!

“Sword of Light, whom I do release!”

Orphen shouted, as he directed his hand towards the centre of the mist. A wave of heat and light flew towards the black fog, but it got blown away by the swirling vortex.....then, the fog started to gather again.

“M-Master.....”

Majic said behind Orphen, his voice wavering. Orphen didn’t look back, he was solely concentrating on Samii.

“This spectre. How are we going.....”

“It’s not a spectre. It’s a man-made beast.”

“Fine, how do we beat this man-made beast?”

“Ask the fish, maybe it knows.”

Orphen said, pointing to the fish on the ground. He was joking, but Majic took him seriously.

Majic took a deep breath, and slowly walked towards——

“Watch out!”

Orphen knocked Majic to the ground, he got back up and shouted:

“Master, what are you——”

As Majic shouted, he became aware of a hand holding a knife on the ground——it was Kenkurimu.

“Ahh.....”

Majic felt sick, his cry echoing throughout the basement. Orphen quickly straightened his arm, and cried:

“Sword that has conquered demons, I brandish!”

With that cry, a sword appeared in Orphen’s hands. He drew a deep breath, and brought down the sword upon the invisible Kenkurimu, slicing the hand off and cracking the floor.

And then——

“Uwaaa.....”

Majic shouted again, a dark black whip appeared out of the shaft above the sink. It made a whip like motion towards Majic’s feet. Whack! ——Flesh was crushed, blood and meat flew across the room. Majic wasn’t hit, but the fish was. The huge fish was now divided in two, cold blood spilled onto the floor.

“Sword of light——”

Orphen aimed for the shaft, but the whip was too fast——

(Too late!)

If he doesn’t get his attack off, his head could be cut off.

Clang!

A sharp metal sound rung out, Hirieta had blocked with whip with her knife. Orphen looked at her thin face——she had a nervous smile. Orphen then turned and shouted:

“Sword of Light, whom I do release!”

Shine!

A white light filled the basement, and the resulting explosion from Orphen’s attack broke off part of the ceiling. Falling rubble and sand fell from the hole——hidden in the rubble was a heavy figure covered in damp sand, it stood up——its black armour was the first thing you saw.

Hirietta held a knife in her hand, and warned them:

“.....That one is Accelerator, he’s very dangerous.”

“Does it matter, all of them are dangerous!”

Majic yelled, he started running away.

(This is indeed the truth.....)

Orphen agreed with him, but as soon as he turned around he saw the human form of Samii.

“I don’t know anything about any of these freaks, how am I meant to deal with these guys?”

“Kill him.”

Hirietta said.

“.....What?”

“Don’t tell me you can’t do it. You are a student of the continents greatest sorcerer, Childman taught you all of his skills, you can do it Krylancelo!”

“?”

She said, Majic didn’t understand a word she was saying—he looked back and forth at Orphen and Hirietta, obviously confused. Orphen gritted his teeth. Hirietta pointed her knife at the man-made beats, waiting for Orphen’s orders. But—they never came.

Orphen didn’t know how to defeat these creatures, he could only think of one course of action—retreat.

(We’ve got to get out of here.)

Orphen said inside himself as he wiped his forehead.

“I’ve fought Azalie before, one monster was enough.”

“.....Huh?”

Orphen’s eyes then became cold—and very calm, he then looked at Majic.

“.....Hey. You said Cleo was dead, is it true?”

“Ah.....”

Majic put his hand over his mouth. He regretted telling him that.

“Um—yes.”

“Right.....”

Orphen then turned to Hirietta.

“We’ve got to get out of here. We’ll become cornered if we stay here any longer, everyone head towards the exit when I give the signal. Hirietta, you go first. Majic, you go second——”

“.....Although I agree with your proposal.”

Hirietta interrupted him, then she bit her red lips and said:

“Aren’t you forgetting one important thing? There are four man-made beasts.”

Orphen was dumbfounded by her words, he then looked towards the door——
He saw the slender body of the half-man half-snake——Kikyuimu.

“Ahh.....”

A high pitched moan extruded from the depths of his throat——Kozen had regained consciousness. His head was aching, it was very painful. When the pain finally subsided, he found out that it was more than just a head wound. Although his left shoulder had stopped bleeding, he could still feel a tingling sensation.

“That guy——what an asshole.”

Saliva was dropping from his mouth, he wiped it away and sat up. He pressed down on his head wound, and looked around the room. His vision was covered by a thick layer of fog, he could barely see. After a while, he found that his eyes gradually adjusted to the darkness.

He was in a room. Now he noticed that the afternoon sky was pouring in from a hole in the ceiling, it seemed he fell through the ceiling at some point. In the middle of the room was a bed——or you could say it was a bed, but it looked more like a surgical table. Except there was no overhead lighting, except for a gas lamp that wasn't working.

The room was big, he learned that he was currently on the second floor of a house. There was tattered wreckage in all corners of the room, he could see some surgical instruments among the wreckage.

“An operating room.....?”

Kozen thought. If this was true, then he could very well be in a hospital.....

He checked his waist, his sword was still there, so he pulled it from its scabbard. Although his memory was kind of fuzzy, he knew that the “spectre” was the one who captured him. He summarized that he was blown here by a small tornado, and fell through the ceiling, thus he shouldn't be too far from the village.

“Wait a minute.”

Kozen thought of something.

“F-Fonogorosu, I've heard about that crazy guy, maybe this place is.....”

He stepped forward, his foot stepped on something soft——he frowned and looked down, it was a huge pile of dust. There was all kinds of crushed stuff mixed in, he saw thin bones. It looked like a cat's bone——however, it looked like the entire body of a cat.

“What the hell, what cat has five feet?”

Of course, Kozen wasn't really interested in finding the answer. He lifted his face up, his gaze shifted to something lying on the table——



Upon closer inspection, it turned out to be someone he saw in the village—it was the girl that roundhouse kicked him. Her eyes were closed, her hands were clasped together, she was lying there motionless. She seemed to have stopped breathing.

(Is she injured.....?)

Kozen was surprised, he put his hand on the girl's neck. He kept them there for a moment, then sighed.

"She's dead——no.....strange."

He was confused. There was no pulse, but her body temperature was warmer than the room. He wondered how she was put in this state, he thought of a couple scenarios but none of them were satisfactory.

"Hmph."

Kozen put his sword back in his scabbard, he didn't know if the girl was really dead or alive, but he couldn't just leave her body here. Even though he was an assassin, he did have his morals.

He put his arms around the girl, she was lighter than he expected. He looked around, he didn't know what else to do, he could only think of escaping. Then——

He noticed something strange. There was a black hole in the corner of the room, it looked like some kind of shaft, he observed it as he got closer.

Boom!

An explosion came from the hole.

"——Magic?"

At the same time, he heard voices.

"Does it matter, all of them are dangerous!"

He vaguely heard, he could hear a woman's and a man's voice.

"Is there fighting.....down that hole?"

Kozen said quickly.

"Down that hole.....I think there's a basement. And someone is using magic, could it be....."

Whack!

Kozen suddenly felt something strike him from behind. It was——a black mist!

It started to swirl around him, he dropped the girl's body in the confusion. Had the room been any darker, he would have surely been engulfed in no time.

"Bastard!"

His hands went for his scabbard, but he found no sword.

"How could——?"

He exclaimed, then the mist suddenly divided into two halves. He saw his sword shining in the middle of the fog, then it came at him——

“.....If your opponents strength is greater than yours—and you want to win, how would you go about doing this? Krylancelo.”

It was a voice from his distant memory, a calm voice—it was the voice of the greatest black sorcerer on the continent, Childman.....

Orphen, Krylancelo didn't know, his teacher shrugged. He easily replied:

“You bluff.”

Orphen thought about the four man-made beasts that surrounded them, especially the one which was blocking the exit.

“I've thought of something.”

“Huh?”

Majic sighed, he didn't think they had a chance of winning. He grabbed Hirietta by the waist, she gave him a troubled look, but he didn't notice.

Orphen started to smile, as he removed his headband.

“This plan of yours better now fail, Orphen.”

His student looked at him strangely, he didn't saw a word, he just gave him his headband. Then Orphen took off his jacket and give Majic that too. Finally.....he handed him his dragon pendant.

Majic looked at it for a moment. It was a dragon wrapped around a sword—proof that the wearer was from the Tower of Fang. He then looked at the back of it, the name of the owner was engraved—Krylancelo.

“Master.....?”

Majic was puzzled. Orphen shifted his gaze towards Samii.

“If I die, take the dragon pendant back to the Tower of Fang. Tell them it was a student of Childman's, just quote my name, you won't be ignored.”

“M-Master!”

Majic was surprised. His green eyes widened, he went on to say:

“Don't say that. It's bad luck.”

“When the snake moves away from the door, get out of here.”

“That's great if we can get out, but what about you?”

A bead of sweat fell from Hirietta's face. Orphen didn't answer her.

"You can't do this alone!"

(.....I'm sure Cleo would say the same thing.)

Orphen smiled, and said:

"I know."

Majic interrupted:

"Fighting against such an enemy, you know the odds!"

"I know."

Orphen busted out laughing——

"Even if we all had knives, all we could do is stab them."

Stab, a way an assassin kills, Majic didn't understand the meaning behind his words.

"Why, you don't have to fight these guys Master!"

"Why? These guys killed Cleo."

"Ah.....!"

Majic was shocked.

"Master, do you want revenge?"

"These guys killed Cleo. They'll get what's coming to them!"

Then, Orphen ran forward. His target was Samii. Seeing his movements, the suit of armour slowly began to move——

"Orphen!"

"Master!"

Ignoring their cries, Orphen shouted:

"I'm over here, Samii!"

The "armour" rushed to block his path, Orphen raised his right hand, the dark force stretched out towards him——

"I am Fonogorosu!"

With those words, their magic was stopped.

"Sword of Light, whom I do release!"

A wave of light and heat struck the "armour" in the face. It wasn't particularly effective, but it was enough to send two hundred kilograms of armour flying a couple of meters. Sounds of heavy fighting erupted in the basement.

Orphen didn't stop, he still ran.

In front of him was Samii, his face stiffened as he cried——

"Fonogorosu——is here! Kill him!"

Hiss!

Orphen heard a hissing sound coming from the exit, it was the snake.

(I knew it, all these man-made beasts follow Samii's orders.)

"Sword of Light, whom I do release!"

A barrage of light and heat was sent at the ghostly image of Samii, his body dispersed from the resulting explosion.

Meanwhile, Orphen quickly turned around. He saw the "snake" rushing his position, it opened its mouth and bared its fangs.

A spray of yellow liquid shot from its mouth. Orphen rolled out of the way, the liquid landed on the ground and made a strange sound. A second later, part of the floor was dissolved.

(Venom!)

It came at him again, but this time Orphen jumped behind it and shouted:

"I see thee, Lady of Chaos"

The snake man's body was engulfed in a whirlpool of gravity, its elongated body was mercilessly beat to the ground. The snake staggered as it got up, Orphen was ready to carry out his next attack. Orphen jumped up—he looked down, and sure enough, Kenkurimu appeared on the floor. Sensing that its prey avoided it, it then sunk back into the floor.

Once Orphen landed, he once again faced the group of man-made beasts. He then heard footsteps echoing in the distance, Majic and Hirieta had succeed in escaping.

He carefully observed his enemies—all the man-made beasts had suffered an attack, but they all had recovered from any damage. They all took their former positions once again, except for the "hand" who could not be seen.

Samii stared straight into the eyes of Orphen, he glared back at him.

"Let's get this started!"

Chapter 6 – The idiot who stops an idiot

“Sword of Light, whom I do release!”

A wave of light and heat hit the “snake” in the head. The snake man acted as if he was hit by a large hammer, it was knocked to the floor. Orphen continued:

“——Sword of Light!”

A white light cut vertically into the snake man’s body. Then——

“Sword of Light, whom I do release!”

Whack! The snake man was hit with a wave of light and heat three times, it was now consumed in a raging inferno. But——amidst the fires, Orphen could see that the snake man didn’t suffer any major injuries.

Orphen could sense it’s eyes looking at him, he jumped backwards. After he jumped, he continued to jump out of the basement, slamming the door after he exited. With his hands firmly holding the door in place, he shouted:

“I close thee, border of fate!”

Thud——the heavy door shook. Now, the door wouldn’t be opened so easily. And——

“I giveth thee, giant’s fortune!”

As he shouted, the door began to shake. He could see that the door was swelling little, expanding into the surround wall. The door and the wall were now melded together.

Orphen breathed, and wiped the sweat from his chin.

“It’ll be impossible to open that without some explosives——Samii and that suit of armour should be okay, but if that snake tries anything, he’ll surely suffocate in the raging fire.....”

Orphen was finished, all he had to do now was climb the dark stairs. However, Orphen was scared, he hands were trembling. He reached down to the floor, he was going to rest——but——

Hissss!

A shrill voice could he heard from the other side of the door, small gaps started to appear in the door and the wall——yellow venom oozed out. It had a strong odour. He could see that parts of the wall and door were now being dissolved.

A moment later, the door fell down.

“Ahhh!”

Upon seeing this, Orphen jumped backwards. The “snake” stood at the entrance, there was residual venom hanging from its mouth. Behind the snake, there was no flame, just a gas lamp lighting the room.

“Bastard.....”

Orphen cursed under his breath.

“How the hell are you still alive?”

Orphen could feel his scalp itching, he remembered.

(This guy's skin.....and Hirieta's clothing. Are they the same thing?)

He thought. If the snake man's skin was the same as Hirieta's leather clothing, then physical attacks won't do any good. If that's the case——

Just as Orphen was lost in thought, he heard a hiss, the snake man raced towards him.

(No way——Hirieta. She can't be a man-made beast, can she?)

The "snake" opened it jaws.

It was clear to Orphen, it was going to spit venom, he was going to jump backwards, but suddenly——it was like his right foot was nailed to the floor.

(——!)

A deadly chill raised throughout his body, he couldn't move. Looking down at his sturdy boots, he saw something——there was a knife lodged into the sole of his right boot, the "hand" was holding it tightly.

Then, he got a taste of the venom.

"Ah——!"

He lurched his head to the left, he was able to avoid some of the venom, luckily none landed on his face. However, there was a strong odour coming from his left shoulder and abdomen, he could see smoke rising——his clothes were being dissolved, the stench was intense, his entire body was instantly wrought with pain. He could see parts of his skin being dissolved, the pinkish muscles beneath the skin were now visible. Yellow smoke started to rise from his wounds, his blood and the snake's venom had intermixed, creating an unbearable stench.

"I heal thee——"

Orphen put his right hand over his wounds, he screamed the rest of the incantation.

"——scar of the setting sun!"

Physical pain is very dangerous, more dangerous than even spiritual damage. Treating the trauma is simple, but enduring the pain is not an easy task. Especially when the state of the wound is very bad, scaring yourself to death is always possible.

Once the incantation is said, the wound will be reversed due to the manipulation of time using magic. His clothes are easily repairable, but new flesh had to be laid on his body due to the damage. After his wounds were healed, Orphen waved his hand towards the snake man, and cried:

"I call thee, sisters of rupture!"

An invisible shock wave struck the snake man, at the same time, Orphen was also affected by the shock wave——he had trouble breathing, his body was going numb, he threw his body backwards, he was trying to get free of the grip of the "hand".

He violently fell backwards onto the stairs, Orphen then tried to climb the stairs. At the same time, he pointed a finger towards the "snake".

"Guide me, O Starling of Death!"

A burst of sound waves struck the “snakes” body, its body was twisted all over. It was like a piece of clothing being wrung dry, it then smacked the floor.

(For Hirieta and that snake guy to have the same kind of protection, it’s got to be more than a coincidence.)

Whatever it is, he’s got to find its weakness.

(Since these are test subjects, that means they aren’t the finished product, so they’ve got to have some kind of defect.)

“Come on, Samii! I’m Fonogorosu! I’m escaping!”

Orphen ran up the stairs, yelling at the unseen creatures behind him. He made every effort to run as fast as he could, stumbling all the while. He could hear the sound of a whip behind him, the armour downstairs must have released its black tentacles. Orphen barely dodged the first attack, it sunk deep into the wall beside his head.

"————!"

Orphen silently screamed. He could now hear the armour thrashing behind him, he didn’t want to look back, for he knew it was right behind him.

Whoosh!

Suddenly, the suit of armour jumped in front of him using its tentacles. He saw its helmet open up a little, Orphen shouted:

“I dance in thee, mansion of heaven!”

Bang——flash. In a moment, he jumped ten meters ahead of the armour. It uttered a sharp sound from its helmet, and in a flash, wires appeared in front to blow Orphen’s path.

(Steel wires——)

If Orphen didn’t time this right, he could be cut into shreds.

(Damn it, these monsters are tough.)

He could feel a stinging sensation coming from his head, he must have been scratched by a steel wire. Orphen felt his head get wet, but he didn’t let this get to him. Remembering his training in the Tower of Fang brought him great pride, he wasn’t going to let something like this put him to shame.

(Now……I feel weakened.)

But——

“You killed Cleo, I should let you have a taste of hell!”

He said angrily, the “armour” was ready to launch a second attack, Orphen stretched his arm out.

“Sword of Light, whom I do release!”

The “Armour” swallowed the attack, Orphen turned immediately, and jumped into the hall.

(Damn it, looks like I’ll be fighting near the Goddess’. However——)

However——will he rely on someone else to win? He thought.



(I seems I might need some help.....Cleo——)

Orphen said inside himself, while running.

“Really, he’s here? Business member A.”

“My name is Louis.”

“What?”

“I said.....my name is Louis.”

Vulcan stared at the names of the children, he certainly recognized the name of business member A.

He then snorted, and said: “You don’t have a past anymore! Abandon your name!”

(These guys are pests.....)

Dortin looked anxious, he was silent. He looked at the flag made out of sheets that his brother made. He didn’t know where he got it from, but apparently he had got more bed linen, he used paint to write “Master of our destiny, Vulcan’s chamber of Commerce. Never apologize to the loan shark”.

Then Louis said: “Give up your name, do you want to join?”

“Business member A.”

Vulcan pointed to one of the children. The child stood still for a moment, he said:

“I am Davis. Louis——”

“Yes, just like that.”

“My name is Mike.....”

“Continue.”

“I am Lambert.”

“What about you?”

“Toby.”

“My goodness, this is taking forever!”

“I have the cool name of Kaufman!”

“Nina.”

Vulcan continued to look at the kids, while Dortin stood behind his cloak. He quietly whispered into his ear.

“Brother, we’ve got more names than people.”

“.....”

After listening to Dortin for a moment—he looked towards the sky, it was the afternoon, the sun was shining, there was a cool breeze, and birds were chirping. For a while, he wanted to learn more about them. However, Vulcan had business to attend to.

“You! Are you kidding me!?”

Vulcan waved the flag at the kids, four of the children screamed and ran away. He stared coldly at the children that remained, then he turned around and faced a mansion——

The building was known as the “haunted mansion” by the locals, all the windows were boarded up, nobody could see inside. From the information Vulcan had obtained, he summarized that this place was the hideout of that spectre.

Then——

“You guys, behave yourselves, if you don’t value your lives, you will die!”

Vulcan then swung the flag, and went on to say:

“Listen up! We have a task, it’s related to my fate! That bastard loan shark, that heartless bastard. If he comes near us, let’s hang him upside down from a bell tower!”

Just then, the front door of the mansion opened. A blonde kid ran out of the haunted mansion in a panic——it was Majic.

“Huh?”

The young boy had just noticed them.

“What are you doing here?”

“Ah, well.....”

Dortin was hesitant to answer, he pointed towards his brother. Vulcan stared at Majic. Meanwhile, the sheets with blue painted words fluttered in the wind.

“Oh.....never mind.”

Majic said breathlessly. Then he said:

“Did you see a woman come out before me?”

“A woman?”

“Her name.....is Hirietta. She looks very dangerous. We got separated on the way out.”

“No, we didn’t see anyone else come out.”

Dortin said as he shook his head, Majic was frustrated.

“This is trouble.....I might be scolded by master.”

“We’ve been here for a while though.”

Then——

Smash!

Overhead——a window was broken, someone came flying out and glass fragments flew everywhere.

The body rapidly fell down, like the person was thrown out the window. Like a stone, the person whacked the ground with a loud thud.

“Ah, it’s an assassin!”

Dortin cried. The assassin—a man called Kozen, his face was full of fear, he pressed down on his left shoulder. He then noticed Majic and the others, he looked curiously at them.

Kozen slowly, angrily said:

“In the end, that woman.....”

“Hey!”

Dortin shouted. Kozen stumbled as he tried to stand up, Vulcan and his chamber of commerce (plus one) stared at the assassin.

While running down the hall, Orphen managed to avoid the whips of the “armour”. If he stopped or messed up even once, he would surely be cut into pieces by the numerous whips. The only thing that could be heard in the deserted mansion was Orphen’s footsteps and the Armours movements.

Finally—Orphen had reached the main hall. He ducked under the state of the goddess’, this served as an obstacle to block the “armours” attacks. Also, the state was four meters tall, which gave him a sense of security.

However, it wasn’t the suit of armour that came after him—it was the snake, it rushed towards Orphen’s position.

(Damn it, that bloody came can probably smell me.)

Orphen left the shadow of the statue, he rolled on the floor and shouted the following incantation:

“I see thee, Lady of Chaos!”

Like being surrounded by a lady wearing a black dress, shadow-like swirls of gravity struck the snake man to the ground. It wouldn’t kill the snake, but it was more effective than using physical attacks. The snake tried shooting venom as it saw Orphen running towards it.

He jumped on top of the man-made beast, putting his hands on the snake’s throat.

“I tear thee, wall of the earth!”

Whack!

It was like a giant sickle hit the snake man in the head, it opened its mouth and screamed—Orphen quickly stuffed his left fist in its mouth.

“Goodbye.”

Then, he immediately cried:

“I call thee, sisters of rupture!”

—In an instant, the snake man's body rapidly expanded, whether it was its eyes or nose, fluids and flesh began to pour out of all its holes. The shockwave was tearing apart the snake man's organs. Orphen used his right hand to wipe the blood from his body, and pulled his left hand from its mouth. His leather glove had been eroded by the snake man's horrendous venom, while the venom hadn't reached his skin, Orphen threw the glove to the floor.

"First I've got to——"

He saw the armour standing at the entrance, it lunged towards him, almost like giving his lover a hug.

"What?"

Orphen muttered, as the "armour" opened up its helmet.

Numerous metal whips made out of steel began to form a human shape. Then——

Orphen didn't even have time to think, as the assault began.

"You idiot!"

Orphen blurted out, he grabbed the corpse of the snake man and flung it towards the "armour". He could hear numerous puncture sounds as both bodies flew across the hall.

Taking advantage of this opportunity, Orphen started moving. He looked at the suit of armour, stretch out his right hand, and exclaimed:

"Sword of Light, whom I do release!"

A wave of light and heat flew from Orphen's hand, and hit the "armour". Although it struck the armours chest, the result was no different than before——the "armour" calmly stood up. The snake didn't move one bit, it was certainly dead.

(How the hell am I supposed to destroy this "armour".)

Although it wasn't entirely impossible——

Orphen's heart was beating wildly, he ran back behind the statue of the goddess'. Blood rushed to his face, sweat was dripping from him uncontrollably, and he was out of breath.

(I'm almost at my limits——I don't think I can use much more magic.)

As a result, he'd need to avoid unnecessary attacks. If he made any hasty movements, the last of his strength would be wasted.

Orphen put his hand on the statue. Then suddenly——

"——I'm done for!"

The hand came out from inside the statue of the goddess', it seized Orphen's left hand. It's thick fingers dug into his skin, causing his hand to go red. The "hand" had a surprisingly strong grip, it was like it was made out of stone.

Orphen tried with all his might to remove the hand, but he couldn't make it budge one bit. The suit of armour then began to stand up, it turned to face Orphen. Numerous whips flew out from it's body, and went towards Orphen.

(This is it.)

Orphen determined, with the hand stilling holding onto him, he shouted:

"I dance in thee, mansion of heaven!"

In an instant, Orphen teleported not far from the ceiling of the hall. It was such a long distance—moving ten meters isn't that easy. Orphen didn't even know if he would succeed, but he'd rather suffer a fall than he hit by the "armours" attack. He looked over at the "hand".

It was still stuck to his left arm. The hand was very hairy, he thought that it belonged to an ape or some other creature. What looked like veins stretched for about half a meter from the hand, at the end was a "brain" the size of a fist. It was the "hand", and the rest of Kenkurimu.

Orphen didn't want to teleport again, he was afraid of appearing inside a wall or in the floor...

Right now he was in the air, he couldn't escape. Orphen grabbed the "hand" as he fell, and reached towards the brain, he crushed it with all his might, the "hand" then let go of Orphen.

During this, he continued to fall—he was directly above the statue of the goddess', he saw the "armour" waiting below.

(I hope this works...)

"Sword of Light, whom I do release!"

His target wasn't the armour, but the feet of the goddesses—the lower part of the statue exploded, the statue began to tilt—

Orphen's feet touched the head of the statue, his body was like a pendulum, in a flash, he jumped along the heads of the goddesses, almost superfluously. In short, he wanted the statue to fall upon the "armour".

Orphen flew from the statue and landed on the floor, breaking a few ribs in the process. He looked up, the armour had been crushed by the statue, an invisible shadow moved through the dust, Orphen's breathing was intense, he thought:

(Great, so that leaves.....)

Orphen said, as he stood up, and looked around the hall.

At this time—

A shadow stepped out from a corner of the hall, it moved towards him. It had a slender figure, it's long black hair swinging wildly, as it started clapping.

Orphen whispered:

"Majic?"

"I let him go outside, then I came back."

The figure—it was Hirieta, she was smiling.

Orphen angrily wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"So you've been hiding in the dark watching from the side-lines?"

"I wanted to see how things played out."

Hirieta said, as she looked at the statue of the goddesses.

"You seem very happy."

Orphen touched his injured left hand with his right hand, he didn't think the wound was that deep, there was excessive bleeding and paralysis setting in. If possible, he wanted to use magic to heal his injuries, but he didn't have the strength to do so.

"It seems I was right."

"About what?"

Orphen asked. She replied:

"You really are a strong sorcerer, one of the best on this continent."

".....So what."

Orphen unhappily said:

"I've defeated those man-made beasts, all that's left is Samii. But I don't have the power to—"

He said in a very small voice.

Thud!

They both heard the opening and closing of a door, it sounded like it came from the second floor. Tap, tap.....he could hear soft footsteps, Orphen's ears stood up. It was coming from the second floor balcony, he glanced at Hirieta, she heard it too, but she just stood there with her arms folded.

Orphen whispered:

"It can't be Samii, he can't make noise walking. It must be another man-made beast."

Hirieta shook her head. She then spoke in a calm tone:

"Do you know why they call Samii the strongest man-made beast?"

"Why?"

Orphen was confused, she kept talking:

"He can appear anywhere, and attack from anywhere. He also has the ability to control other man-made beasts.....and more..."

"That means....."

Orphen had a surprised look on his face, Hirieta pulled a dagger from her leg.

"I don't know how he does it, but Samii can possess any creature, and control it. That kid Majic, didn't he say something about Cleo being dead?"

Just then, the footsteps stopped.

They looked up—at the top of the stairs stood a girl, her petite body was standing still.

Orphen felt his heart wavering.

"Cleo?"

It was her, she stood at the top of the stairs, holding a blade in her hand. Her eyes were dull, like she had just been woken up. Since Orphen used so much magic in the windowless hall, the air in the room was hot, it produced some airflow.

Hirietta suddenly said:

"I don't think I need to remind you, but she is still alive. Don't be too reckless, or you'll injure her."

"That goes for you too——"

Then——

Thud! Something landed behind them, they turned around and saw Cleo on the floor.

(Did she jump from the stairs?)

Orphen instinctively jumped backwards——Cleo threw her sword at him, and quickly ran towards him. Orphen easily rolled out of the way, Cleo immediately picked up her sword, and attacked again.

Orphen ducked——he just barely avoided her attack. He could hear the sound of the air above him being cut, the sound was slightly painful. It was like being in a dream, a hot, slow moving scene, Cleo attacking without the slightest pause, her blade reflecting the coldness——

(She's trying to kill me!)

Orphen cried in his heart. Since his opponent was Cleo, he decided to attack her eyes with his right hand——

Suddenly, Cleo disappeared.

He looked around, he saw the girl lying on the ground. Hirietta had kicked her from the side.

"You okay?"

Hirietta asked. Orphen stood motionlessly as he looked at Cleo in horror, and said:

"Yeah, I'm fine."

He took the sword from Cleo's hands. Her hands were cold.

Hirietta put her dagger back in her sheath, she sighed, and said:

"It looked like you were going to die, and I thought you were good."

"Sometimes, I forget to use my reflexes."

Orphen unhappily said, as he threw the sword to the second balcony.

"Since I left the Tower of Fang five years ago, my combat skills aren't what they used to be."

Clatter, the sword landed on the second floor. Orphen smiled.

"Anyway, Hirietta.....what is Samii really?"



"Huh?"

Orphen left Hiriatta puzzled, he then pulled Cleo's body closer. He touched her belly like a doctor, tapping it slightly—he stopped.

"Here?"

Orphen threw himself backwards, Cleo silently wailed.

"———!"

She began to cough. Lying on the floor, she wanted to take a deep breath, but she couldn't, she could only keep coughing. Orphen observed this, and wiped cold sweat from his head.

A black mist then began to form around her face, it swirled around her and then dissipated.

Cleo stopped coughing. She lay there motionless, her face buried in some dirt on the floor.

Orphen felt uneasy, as he quietly watched her.

"Hey.....Cleo?"

"You did a good thing!"

Cleo suddenly stood up, she then slapped Orphen's face. Facing such an attack, he took a few steps backwards.

"Is this how you treat your saviour!"

"Saviour? I was coughing wildly! I even saw my father waving to me on a flower filled shore!"

"Well, I——"

Cleo silenced him with a movement of her hand, she pointed at him and angrily said:

"And you had the nerve to hit my stomach! If something happened to me, you are the one to blame, Orphen!"

(I'm the one to blame?)

Orphen thought.

"Listen, I——"

"Where's your common sense? How could you hit me?"

"But I was——"

"I was out for a long time, you could have kissed me. One time I fell down the stairs and hit my head, I wanted to live in a monastery! Heck, I even got some brochures!"

"Shut up!"

Orphen was running out of patience, he tripped her with his foot.

"If I really wanted to do some damage, I would have hit your stomach or uterus, that way you would be vomiting blood right about now."

"Listen——"

Hirietta spoke.

"What can we do to get her back to normal?"

"Well, your guess is as good as mine."

Orphen said, as he scratched his head.

"Anyway, we should be able to handle any attack she throws at us."

The girl was sitting on the ground. Orphen shrugged as he continued

"However, when I was almost killed last night, I think Samii was trying to control my consciousness. I was unable to breathe, I think Samii's body is some type of gas that enters the lungs and dominates the body—he possesses people and makes sure they don't suffocate, I suspect he is also made out of a high concentration of oxygen."

After he had finished speaking, Cleo spoke with a sinister tone:

"That's just speculation, why don't you try hitting me again?"

Orphen looked at her, and said:

"Even if I can't force you out from her lungs, there are a couple of other methods I could try."

Cleo momentarily had a puzzled expression, but it quickly turned into a mischievous smile.

"If you want, you could help me find a certain place."

"......Cut it out, you damn five year old....."

"But——"

Hirietta interrupted them.

"If Samii is actually gas, how do we fight him?"

"Simple, we just gather him inside something."

Orphen joked. He then turned to Hirietta.

"One way or another, we'll think of something."

"......"

Hirietta didn't say anything else, she took a deep breath and looked around, it was like she was looking for something.

Orphen sighed.

"Come on, let's get out of here. We'll need to prepare to remove Samii."

Orphen said, helping at the dust off Cleo. Much to her dismay.

"This place is full of dust, I can't stand it."

"......If you two want to go, you can leave first."

——Listening to her words, Orphen couldn't help but feel that something bad was going to happen. Unexpectedly, he put his hand on Cleo's shoulder, his hand was bright red.

"Cleo, can you do something for me?"

".....What is it?"

"You leave first, go outside and see if Majic is there."

"Alright, but aren't you coming?"

He looked directly at Cleo, then simply pointed at Hirieta.

"This mansion, these monsters lived here. It's too dangerous for you to stay, but me and Hirieta should be fine."

"....."

Orphen avoided direct eye contact with Cleo, he went on to say:

"Once you find Majic, tell him to put oil around the house and set it on fire, that should be enough."

"Fire?"

Cleo said with a puzzled expression.

"If we set the mansion on fire, what about you?"

"We'll find a way to escape, don't worry about us."

Orphen finished talking, he then pointed towards the exit and told Cleo to leave.

"Please, don't leave too late. You've got to get out before all the exits are blocked."

"I know....."

Orphen pushed her, and turned his head. She took a couple of steps forwards, she stopped——turned her head, and gently said:

"Orphen, am I a burden to you?"

"Yes, most of the time you are a burden to me....."

Hearing this, Cleo was instantly hurt, her face became distorted. Orphen looked at her face, and said:

"Not in that way, both you and Majic are burdens that weigh me down——without you, god knows where I'd be drifting."

".....?"

Cleo didn't say anything. She quickly ran towards the exit, she turned back, with mixed feelings, she said:

"Don't get burned."

".....Huh. No matter what you say, she still listens."

Hirieta joked. Orphen was too lazy to correct her.

(If I go back to being Krylancelo—I will return to the life of a combat black sorcerer. But since Cleo is still alive, I will remain a loan shark for the time being.)

In short, he's doing it all for her.

".....Is this it?"

Orphen crossed his arms. They were on the second floor. After a decade of no one cleaning the house, dust piled up everywhere, though this room was fairly clean. It didn't feel natural at all, all the rooms windows were nailed shut, the room was very dark. They could make out a bookcase, an empty vase on a table, also on the table was a black and white photo. The bed in the room had a doll in the shape of a bear between the two pillows.

"Yes. I forgot something."

Hirietta said as she stepped into the room, Orphen followed her, and said:

"Is this your room?"

"Yes. Here.....look, I found it."

On the table was a beautiful diary, she picked it up. Then he patted the dust off of it, and held it close to her chest.

Orphen was more interested in what was next to the diary, it was a picture frame—an old black and white photo, it was a man and a woman standing together. The tall young man looked familiar, upon closer inspection, the girl beside him looked like Hirietta. She hadn't changed much over the years, but for some reason the girl in the photo looked more mature, she had long hair, some flowers, and was wearing a long bow.

Both the young girl and man stood side by side, they had their hands on each other's shoulders and were smiling. Orphen could tell that the man was Samii, he had changed much from his picture.

"Is this you in the photo?"

".....Yeah."

Hirietta then turned towards him, exposing a sarcastic smile.

"I bet you want to ask me some questions."

"No, none."

Orphen shrugged. After he regained his strength, he healed his wrist injury. Even though his entire body hadn't fully recovered, this was no problem for him.

"For some reason, I feel like I can't let this place go."

".....Can you think of a reason?"

"Maybe its Samii, maybe I want to burn with him in this place."

After he listened to her words, for a slight moment, her lips trembled.

"I think its my duty, I need to be here until his very last moment."

"Is it because you love him?"

"Yes."

"I was just fifteen years old at the time."

"Its because you were a young girl."

She touched the cover of her diary—then looked around for a place to sit, she sat on the dust covered bed, and continued talking.

"Samii was really good to me—I was just some wandering homeless girl. This diary, he gave it to me for my birthday—he prepared everything in this room, Samii said he got most of the things after the death of his sister, I could tell that he missed her dearly, but I tried not to think of myself as her replacement. You know, he taught me everything from reading to writing, he even got me to live here with Fonogorosu....."

"Regardless of Samii's intent, Fonogorosu had his own plans."

Orphen knew Fonogorosu had ulterior motives—he took the words right from Hirieta's mouth, she wanted to say this, and Orphen could see the rising anger in her eyes.

"It's obvious that a man like Fonogorosu would not feed and clothe someone he didn't know for no reason."

"That's right, he wanted to use me for an experiment, not Samii."

A sarcastic smile went across her face, as her fingers touched the cover of her diary.

"As far as common sense is concerned, no one would willingly sacrifice their body. All the assistants were afraid.....and then Fonogorosu went mad, when it came to my clothes——"

She was referring to her black leather clothing.

"This is something that was involved in the development of a man-made beast, it was made for my fifteen year old self, now it's a little uncomfortable. Fonogorosu wanted to use this for killing sorcerers."

(Is this what happened to Hirieta after being merged with a man-made beast?)

Orphen thought, but he didn't want to ask her if it was true. He decided to ask something else.

"In the end, you weren't transformed?"

Upon hearing this, she laughed out loud.

"No——when I was thrown into the culture tank, Samii pulled me out at the last moment. However, he fell into the tank while pulling me out, Fonogorosu then transformed him instead of me."

At the same time, she hit the bed with her hand.

"There was nothing I could do——every day I went down to the basement and looked into the culture tank that held Samii, on the last day, before he lost consciousness——he said to me, kill me now. Right after that——"

A cold smile froze on her lips.

"He became the first client of the foolish dog Hirieta, and the last."

"I see.....you've had a lot to think about."

After Orphen said that, she laughed.

"Don't take me for a fool, I wasn't born yesterday, Samii is—he's just a memory of my first love. In the eight years since I lost him, I haven't really loved another man. But even so, I couldn't let him suffer like that, that's why over these last eight years I've been looking for a sorcerer that could kill him. When I heard news that you disappeared from the Tower of Fang, I became overjoyed, I knew that would be able to kill Samii. I didn't hesitate using Ostwald to help find you, because I couldn't afford to fail in my endeavour."

"There's something I don't understand."

Orphen sternly said. He asked:

"After Samii left Cleo, I didn't see him go anywhere. Where is he now? You know, right?"

"He's somewhere in this house, probably waiting to seize an opportunity."

"Why hasn't he come to attack?"

"Since you killed all the man made beasts, he's probably confused. He must have believed that such a thing was impossible. You said that you were going to burn the mansion, will that kill Samii?"

Orphen felt that she wanted to take revenge. He replied:

"If he's dispersed throughout the house, then now's a good time."

He then went towards the barricaded window—he punched through the wood, opening a hole in the window, dazzling white light shot into the dark room. It was the afternoon, there was some time before it was evening——

Smoke could be seen from outside the window. Orphen waved the smoke away, and said:

"It's begun. Cleo has done her job, Majic and Vulcan have been mobilized. Vulcan is just like a child.....he's quite the fire starter."

"Will this fire kill Samii?"

Hirietta asked, Orphen said that it would.

"His body is composed of gas, though its probably closer to oxygen. This buildings made out of wood.....his body will surely react with the flammable substances. If he can't get out, he'll turn back into dust."

"....."

Hirietta swallowed. Orphen said to her:

"We can escape using my magic. If you want to witness Samii's last moment, then I won't stop you. If you stay here, you will die within ten minutes."

After listening to Orphen, Hirietta nodded——she didn't say anything. Orphen didn't know if she was going to stay or not.

"Hirietta——eight years ago he died, even if you don't want to admit it, what's left of him will die. You will be burdened no longer."

"You know, there's something I want to say to you."

"What is it?"

"Thank you."

"Huh?"

Orphen shrugged.

"After listening to what you said about Fonogorosu and Samii, it made me happy."

".....Listen....."

Orphen clenched his fist, and said:

"If you really want to stay here, then—I won't stop you. People die all the time for nothing—but I'd rather have you listen to my opinion on the matter——"

"Your opinion?"

She asked, Orphen didn't speak for a moment, he didn't know what to say——

"I don't want someone like you to die."

Unconsciously his face went serious.

Then——

She laughed out loud, she found this hilarious. Orphen maintained a look of displeasure on his face, he regretted uttering such words.

"Haha, haha!"

Vulcan was swinging his arms like a mad man, as he laughed in front of the burning house. His flag was sitting on his shoulder, it read: Vulcan's third Chamber of commerce, let's laugh as the marvellous fire consumes the monsters and the loan shark!

Vulcan proudly shouted:

"This is it! This is what I've been waiting for!"

"....."

The assassin Kozen watched as Vulcan directed his brother Dortin and the children to pour oil around the house.

"Hey! Don't get too close to the fire! Lloyd!"

Cleo skilfully ordered the children, Majic stood behind her. Dortin tugged at the hem of his shirt, the blonde haired boy turned around.

"What?"

Dortin anxiously said:

"Ah.....is this okay? Will the village people just let us burn down this house....."

"I don't think so....."

Majic said, with a blank expression on his face. Dortin then whispered:

"Although I'm not my brother, it wouldn't be good if the loan shark burned to death. Especially if you guys were to blame us."

"You really do talk too much....."

Majic stopped talking, he saw that the flames were now reaching the roof.

"I hope Master knows what he's doing.....he's responsible for all of this."

"You really have no sense of responsibility."

Dortin said, Majic disagreed with him, he said:

"How can you say that? This whole thing was Master's idea, he should be the one to take responsibility. This is a very rational way of thinking."

"Really? Because that sounds like something Vulcan would say."

Dortin asked, he was puzzled. Suddenly, he heard a scream, it was his brothers voice.

"Whaaaaaaaaat?"

Looking back, Dortin saw the little children pouring oil around Vulcan, it seemed they wanted to take revenge. One of them threw a match, the oil was set alight——

"Fire."

"Fire!"

Majic and Dortin shouted, Vulcan ran around in a circle, desperate to escape.

Cleo saw this, and quickly said:

"Ah! Kaufman, get some water!"

"Yes, sister."

"I poured some! Uh, ah! My mistake, that was oil."

The fire grew larger, Vulcan was flung into a frenzy, Kozen then walked towards Majic. The assassin had bloodstained clothes from a previous battle, however his injuries weren't deep. He said:

"If it's alright with you, I'm going to leave."

"Um, okay....."

Majic said, he was surprised, and asked:

"But, aren't you going to help?"

"....."

Kozen deliberately ignored him, then a moment later, he spoke:

"No, I'm not."

His gaze drifted in the direction of Cleo.

Majic noticed this, and said:

"Well, if you are interested in Cleo I suggest you give up, you'll find out she's nothing but trouble."

"I'm not interested in a little girl like her!"

Kozen shouted in a loud voice. Dortin and Majic were both visibly shaken.

Dortin looked up to the assassin, and said:

"Anyway, please take care, mister."

"Call me Kozen."

"Hey."

Majic interrupted.

"No matter what you do, you're still a good-for-nothing assassin. Your kind is despicable."

".....That wasn't very nice....."

Dortin said. Kozen squinted, his face was difficult to see, but he only sighed, he quickly forgot about it and turned around.

"Maybe....."

Majic said slowly.

"That man has no sense of presence, something in his life would need to change before he stopped being an assassin."

(Though I think that's highly unlikely.)

Dortin didn't answer, he just watched Kozen walk further away. Now the house was completely on fire, the only thing that could be heard was the burning of the house, and the yelling of Vulcan.

He knew that he could just leave these people——

However he couldn't feel any pain, but that was exactly what he needed to remember.

Over time, he had the feeling that he was getting "thinner", the howling flames were all around him, taking apart his body——there was no way of knowing where it would go.

He only knew that his body was destined to go somewhere. But after he departs, what would he be leaving behind? This vague question plagued his thoughts. However, he knew that his true self died long ago, what remained was only that shell that wouldn't last much longer. After one hour, the big house burned to the ground, and what was left of him disappeared.

He didn't know where most of his body has gone, but his consciousness remained.

.....

"Ever since I came to this village, it's really been a nice long day."

He heard those words before, it was a familiar voice, a voice that filled him with nothing but horror and despair, but he couldn't remember it. Who are you? Fonogorosu? This world, will it end because of him?

"I intend to repay you, Orphen."

That voice was also familiar, upon hearing it, it filled him with grief.

"It doesn't matter, I wasn't expecting any kind of compensation."

"Your welcome to it. Anyway.....the house has been completely burned down."

"It was old, and the wood was very dry."

"Huh?"

"Look, it's him."

"....."

Naturally, he was speechless.

"Samii doesn't seem to be completely burnt."

".....Only a little."

"Its possible that he regenerated, or maybe there wasn't any combustible materials near him to burn him."

".....There was some."

"Hey, Hirieta?"

She pulled on the back zipper of her outfit, she pulled it down and a handful of mist fluttered into the air——It was the part of Samii that didn't burn, Hirieta held it in her arms like a mother would hold a child, she the picked up a red hot iron from the still burning rubble, and plunged it into her chest.

"Hirieta!"

Someone screamed behind her.

She refused to respond to him——she just wanted to think of that vision she had in her mind. In that vision she saw the hot burning iron burning her skin, her body sweating——the pain was getting more intense, but her brain could only think of one thing.

(I will never forget about you——)

Her chest was badly damaged——but in this wound she saw Samii disappearing, she said:

"Rest in peace, in my chest."

The fog then dissipated, it was gone.

She looked back, Orphen looked like a fool, she said to him:

"Could you do me a favour and heal my wound?"

She propped up her upper body, pulled the zipper back up, and smiled.

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Chapter 7 – Epilogue

Tap.....tap.....tap.....

The footsteps were slow and rough. It was dark everywhere, looking into the darkness you would stare into nothingness.

The smell of the charred wood was intense, the entire mansion had been burned down to the ground, the only thing that remained was the basement. The smell of sewage remained, even though the heat evaporated the sewage water, the air was filled with a rancid smell. On the floor was pieces of a broken sink, shards of glass were everywhere, a peculiar body laid on the floor.

Tap.....Tap.....

The footsteps stopped at the entrance to the basement. The owner of the footsteps lifted his right arm, and chanted:

“I give birth to thee, tiny little spirits.”

With the sound of the incantation, a small fire appeared in his hand. The room was illuminated—and so too was the person. It was a young dark haired man, probably around twenty years old. Large bags were under his eyes, they had a sinister look, as he squinted them. The youth had a quiet demeanour, the air around him was strange.

His mouth slowly opened.

“I think something is wrong.....”

He said in a questioning tone. Then someone answered.

“.....You mean me?”

The voice came from a huge fish on the floor. It lay there motionless, its lower abdomen was torn off, blood was all over the floor, the air smelled a little like gas.

“You really are alive, Fonogorosu. I’ve got questions, three in fact.”

The youth—it was Orphen. He scratched the headband on his forehead.

“I’m guessing you don’t have much time left for questions, I’ll try and be quick. About the statue of the goddesses, I want to hear you say it, what meaning does it have?”

“.....”

Fonogorosu was silent for a moment, then he said:

“I was a heretic, an apostate—are you satisfied with that answer?”

“So you wanted the statue of the goddesses to be destroyed, I thought this place was originally some kind of religious meeting place. Maybe you cursed the gods, or lived in fear of them.”

Fonogorosu didn’t answer, he angrily asked the next question.

“I’ll ask the second question. Why did you want to make man-made beasts? Even the dragon race has exceeded their fighting abilities, and there isn’t even any war now.”

“.....Like the previous question and answer. I’m afraid.....an equal fighting force is needed.”

“.....What are you afraid of?”

“I can’t say. He said I would die. Speaking of the dead—in any case, my body has already perished. Death no longer matters, but I want to die in their hands. I don’t want to know if the soul is destroyed. If you think you know the words——”

His voice was filled with emptiness, it echoed throughout the room.

“Then you might be able to understand it. I was in Kimurakku.”

“The Churches Headquarters in Kimurakku.....?”

Orphen asked, but Fonogorosu was silent. Orphen sighed deeply, he also wanted to ask him about Ramon Fonogorosu.

He asked another question.

“.....How are you able to speak?”

The fishes body lay there motionless, there was no sounds coming from it. It was exactly like a corpse. But then a sound echoed in the basement.....

Fonogorosu didn’t answer. Orphen suddenly noticed that the belly of the fish was cracking open, he could see a vague silhouette—it was a skinny withered old man, he was wrapped in robes, he looked afraid. In the blink of Orphen’s eye, it disappeared.

.....Maybe, maybe he became a true undead.

Orphen thought, as he quietly clenched his right hand. The fire in his hand disappeared.

“.....Goodbye, Fonogorosu.”

Orphen said, he then turned around. He footsteps echoed in the basement as he walked away.

The only thing that was left in that room was darkness, pieces of glass, rubble, water marks, the dead body of a man-made fish beast, the lonely souls of the undead, and many lost secrets.

“Well, Dartin! Let’s take advantage of this opportunity!”

Vulcan shouted. He ran out of the Inn, jumping onto the road leading to the next village, Dartin chased after him. He whispered:

“.....Who would have known things went so smoothly?”

Vulcan intended to get away scot free from the loan shark, as to avoid paying him the money he was owed. However, he was caught and mercilessly beaten for thirty minutes to the point where his joints were dislocated, but now he has recovered, and started running as fast as a rabbit.

Though his brother wasn't as fast.

"Slow down, brother!"

Dortin was slowly catching up, but Vulcan wasn't slowing down.

"Must we escape from this village?"

"That goes without saying!"

Vulcan simply answered. He held one finger in the air.

"Onward, to the hope of tomorrow! I am the Masmaturian Bulldog, Volcano Vulcan, I will be victorious!"

"In other words, that won't happen."

Dortin looked helpless. Vulcan hesitated for a moment, he was going to reprimand him, but he thought of something else.

"However, my brother!"

"Hey!"

"Listen to me!"

"Back at that place——"

"What!"

"They tied a rope to your feet!"

"My feet?"

"Yes, a rope....."

By the time Vulcan knew what he was saying, his face hit the ground. It seemed someone pulled on the rope.

"You are such an idiot....."

"I'm sorry, but you didn't give me time to tell you."

Dortin said, staring at Vulcan on the ground.

"What bastard did this prank.....I'm going to dice him up and cook him with some dried mushrooms....."

Vulcan slowly stood up, and grabbed hold of the rope, it was tied to a black silhouette not far away.

"Hehehehe....."

"L-Loan shark!"

Vulcan shouted. The silhouette——Orphen, grinned wildly.

"Seems like you forgot about someone."

"D-Damn you, Dortin! You were the one who said I wouldn't succeed."

"When did I say that.....?"

Dortin said, but no one was listening.

The loan sharks eyes were full of energy, he lifted his arms up.

“Okay! You owe me money plus interest! If you don’t pay me I’ll be forced to have you arrested.”

“You should have some compassion when it comes to money.”

Dortin whispered to Vulcan.

“Come on, a little further and we’ll be out of here.”

“No.”

“Hey.....just give me a second to.....”

“I don’t think so.”

The black sorcerer smiled. Vulcan looked very frightened.

“I know, you can use my body as payment.”

“Sure, I’ll bring you to a butcher and sell you.”

The sorcerer smiled.

Vulcan was so scared he couldn’t talk.

At that time——

A black figure suddenly appeared on the road. The persons long black hair was full of sheen, the tall beautiful woman was wearing a full body leather outfit. Orphen noticed her, he turned away.

“Don’t bully him, pity him.”

The woman threw a flirtatious wink towards Orphen. Vulcan thought this beautiful woman was here to save him.

“It’s a goddess!”

Vulcan said to her, she lifted her leg and kicked Vulcan in the face. Her hand moved to her mouth, she couldn’t hold back the laughter, the sound of a metallic object came from her bag.

“I want you to have this. Stop avoiding me.”

“What is this, Hirieta?”

The sorcerer asked. Hirieta replied:

“It’s your reward for helping me.”

“Oh.....”

It was a leather bag, it was full of coins. The coins looked a little different from what was normally used on the continent, regardless of this fact, the value isn’t diminished. He didn’t know if they were copper or gold, but he didn’t care as the bag was full of money.

The sorcerer wondered for a moment, but he shook his head.

"I don't want it."

"Me me me me me....."

Vulcan said.

"I bet you don't need a woman to give you money. Stop trying to be such a gentleman."

Hirietta shot Orphen a puzzled look.

"Just take it, this isn't dubious money. It's money that I've saved since running away from home."

"Dubious money, that sounds about right."

Vulcan was now trying to stand up, he tried to reach for the money, Hirietta kicked him back to the ground.

"It's alright, I don't need it."

"Why is that?"

"Because I didn't do this for the money."

Orphen got closer to Hirietta, nearing Vulcan on the ground.

At that moment——

"I have you now!"

Vulcan jumped to his feet, he hit Orphen in the foot with the blunt side of his sword. The sorcerer's face instantly turned white, the pain was intense, he groaned out aloud.

"Hurry, Dortin!"

Vulcan screamed, as tried to break free of the rope.

"I should have expected a move like that....."

"The money....."

"I'll make you scream so much you'll be having nightmares in the middle of the night....."

Hirietta then stepped in front of Orphen, but he shook his head.

"How about I make it more interesting."

"What have you got in mind?"

Dortin said, wondering if it was something mischievous. Hirietta smiled.

"Well, this man——he is very talented, even though he's a little awkward. Help him out a little."

Orphen was perplexed.

"No, I won't accept any kind of him from them two. Besides, I've already got a partner."

Orphen flatly refused. He then looked around, he saw that the rope was cut, and Vulcan had already started running away.

".....?"

Orphen smiled.

“Hey, Majic! Did you get that rope ready?”

“Yes!”

There was a tree across the road—a rope was tied to the tree, it lead to another tree across the road, Majic pulled it and Vulcan ran straight into it, sending him face first into the ground.

“You beast!”

Vulcan struggled, but he was too exhausted to move.

“It worked? It worked!”

Hirietta and Orphen laughed together, this would probably be the last time they did this. Nevertheless, both of them valued and cherished the moments they spent together. Later in life Orphen would reflect on this village, and the scary ghost stories that he left behind for all the children of the village.

End of Sorcerous Stabber Orphen Rogue Journey Book 03: Spectre, Sleeping on My Chest

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